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A MOCKINGBIRD SANG AT CHICKAMAUGA



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A Mockingbird Sang at Chickamauga

A TALE OF EMBATTLED CHATTANOOGA



By ALFRED LELAND CRABB

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To those men and women whose thought and labor have brought Chattanooga from the desolation of a war-torn village to its present pre-eminence in all of life's better phases.

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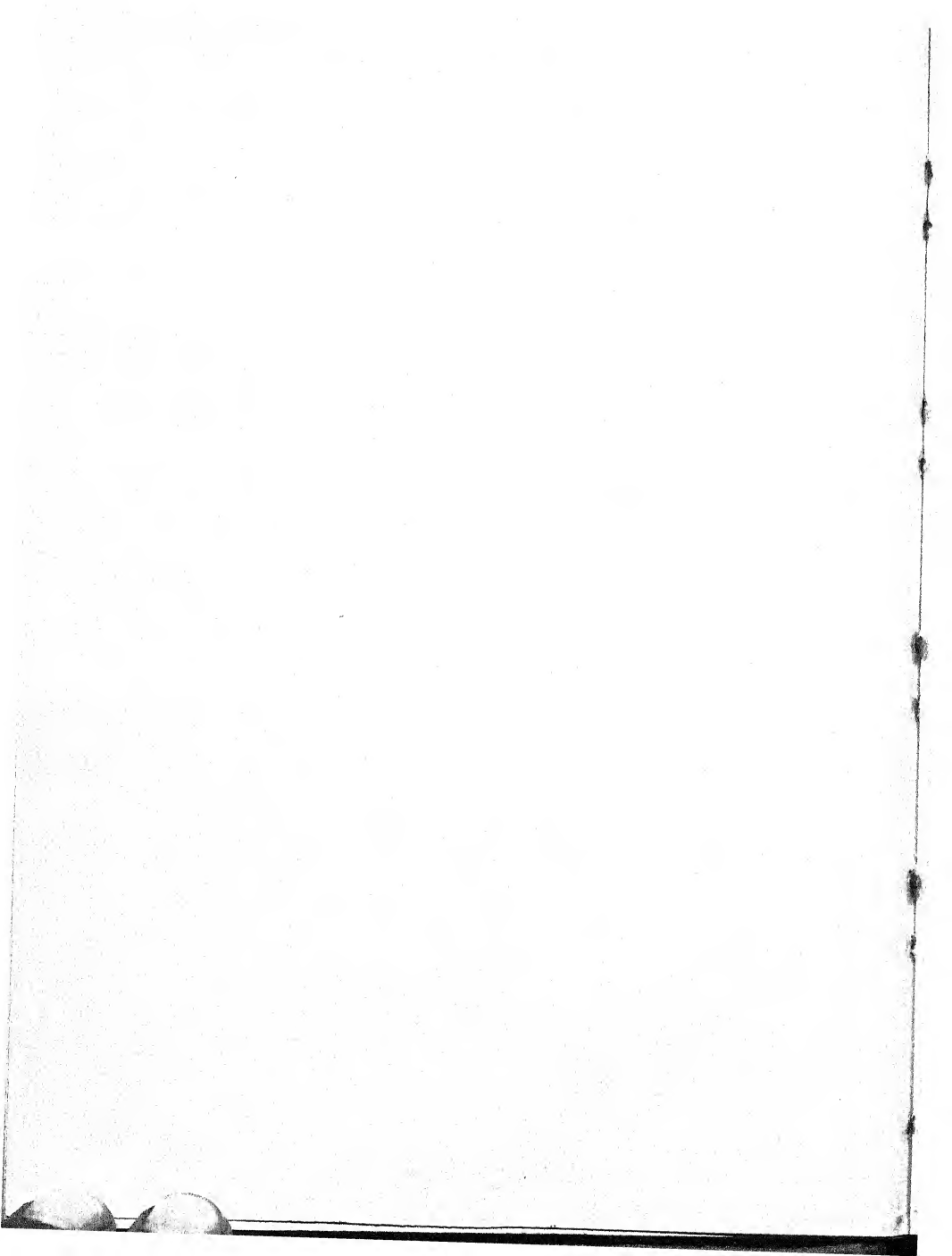
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PART I

A MOCKINGBIRD SANG
ON THE SLOPE OF WALDEN'S RIDGE



A Mockingbird Sang on the Slope of Walden's Ridge

1

ALL during the summer of 1863 Lieutenant Beasley Nichol, of General Nathan Bedford Forrest's command, had been hearing a great deal about Chattanooga. *Chattanooga, Chattanooga, Chattanooga* had run like a refrain through the talk of the soldiers. Something was due to happen at Chattanooga. Something would happen at Chattanooga. Something had to happen at Chattanooga. The finger of Destiny pointed unwaveringly at Chattanooga.

The stories which had reached Nichol told of a long sequence of blunders begun by his own men, but quickly matched by the Yankees. He remembered the outburst of profanity into which his colleagues' inertia had provoked General Nathan Bedford Forrest. That was the day Forrest had sent him upon a mission into the Sequatchie Valley.

"Now don't you go to handin' this *billy doo* I'm a-givin' you to any Yankee," shouted General Forrest, his face a brick red. "And that's what you'd do if you followed the examples set by our great and mighty generals. They let the Yankees march right smack up against a river that they can't get across, or into a mountain cove with no way to get out except the bottleneck they went in by. What do our great generals do? Do they block that bottleneck and tear 'em to pieces with cannon set on the ridges? I haven't heard a cannon go off in so long I am not sure I'd know it. Our generals are plain afraid somebody'll get hurt, maybe a whole leg broke. It looks like it's got plumb old-fashioned to fight. We just march this way awhile, and that way awhile. Then we sit and wait awhile. My notion is we're



in this war for something and to get it we got to lick the Yankees, and my notion is that's liable to be dangerous. I reckon I'm a-gettin' old-fashioned. This is gettin' to be so it isn't my kind o' war."

Then General Forrest had stopped long enough to take a deep breath. While doing so he looked Nichol over a bit intently. "Doggone, if you ain't real purty, Lieutenant——"

"I was under the impression, General Forrest, that you had special orders for me," said Nichol stiffly.

"So I have; so I have," answered the general hurriedly. "No offense, Lieutenant. There's a lot o' Yankee sentiment in the Tennessee hills and I wouldn't want any beauteous maid wheedling secrets out of you. Things like that have happened. I was just giving a friendly warning."

"Perhaps the general would find it better to send someone less easily wheedled."

"Shet up, Lieutenant. Haven't I got a right to have some fun if I want it? And I do want it, with our great and mighty generals teetotally paralyzed from the ears up, and not doing anything from there down. You deliver that message where I said, and don't lose any time doing it. Then I want you to spend a while, maybe two or three months, in Chattanooga. I don't know how long. It all depends."

"Chattanooga! Isn't that a trifle ambitious, General Forrest? The Yankees are likely to start moving in any time."

"Don't ever expect you to get out alive. That's the last thing I look for. Anyhow you'll have good company in your last and final moments. You and Crockett and the sergeant have worked together before. You three been the best spies I ever had. Well, I've sent for them. Whatever devilment the Yankees hatch up will be done in Chattanooga as long as they're in this section, and the sooner I hear about it the more I'll enjoy my rations. So every day at four o'clock I want you to go ask Old Rosey if he's got anything new on his mind and if he has, get me word. If he won't tell you find out some other way, like listenin' through a keyhole."

"When are you looking for Crockett and Goforth, General?"

"I'm lookin' for 'em in from Tullahoma, maybe tomorrow. I can trust you three. You either got sense or luck, and I need a lot of both. I don't want Old Rosey keepin' any secrets from me. When you get that love letter of mine delivered, you cut east and climb Walden's Ridge."

General Forrest unfolded a frayed map. He pointed. "You climb the ridge just about here. I don't think there's many Yankees in that section now, but no tellin' how many there'll be by the time you get there. So don't you act surprised if one steps from behind a tree and nabs you. Jes be natural like you was used to being captured, maybe twice a week. Quote him some Shakespeare, or pretend you're back in the theater acting a part."

"I'll have some very good passages ready, General Forrest."

"You kind of angle down the mountain there. See where that creek runs into the river? It isn't really a creek, just a sort o' slough. Well, Crockett and the sergeant'll be waiting for you in a boat up that creek about a hundred yards. That ought to be next Wednesday, say an hour or two by the sun. They'll be there if everything works out. But I guess you'd better not wait for them longer 'n midnight. If they haven't showed up by midnight, you head for me—wherever I am. If they don't come something's gone wrong and you stay out of Chattanooga like they had the cholera there."

"How'll we get into Chattanooga?"

"Now you're getting real skittish, like our great and mighty generals. Don't ask me any fool questions. They'll already be in. Crockett will have some directions. Follow what you can. Think up the rest."

"All right, General Forrest, and when we get into Chattanooga what do you want us to do?"

"You'll keep your ears pointed and your eyes squinted and get me word what happens—and before it happens at that. Maybe our great generals are willin' to sit around and wait for victory to drop square in their laps, but I'm not. I got to know what's going on. Don't you worry about Chattanooga. Crockett'll arrange for the mayor of the town and nine Yankee generals to meet you with a brass band a-playing pieces."

"I'll leave in ten minutes," said Nichol. "I'll try not to get hemmed up in any mountain cove."

"That's the way I like to hear a fellow talk. I haven't forgot how you three helped out in Nashville last summer." General Forrest tugged at his belt. "I heard you got stuck on some Nashville girl. A little bird whispered to me about it. What was the fair lady's name? No special reason for asking. Just asked it to pass away the time."

"While I was there I met a lady named Hunter Cragwall." Nichol was stiff again.

"A right highfalutin name. She couldn't help being beauteous with a name like that. Well, let's get the war over so you can see her again. Maybe it could be arranged before. Well, run along, Lieutenant. Crockett and the sergeant will be waiting up the creek. Anyways I hope they will. If they ain't that won't be a good sign, and you forget all about Chattanooga. Don't you go to handing my love letters to the wrong people."

2

Lieutenant Beasley Nichol knew that for him trouble was gathering. Some subtle sense had caught the hint of danger and kept sounding its warning. Perhaps he had heard some sound, some soft rustling of leaves, a trifle damp in the heavy shade but parched where the sun could get through; perhaps he had heard some faint whisper of sound among the trees behind him. Almost he could imagine the soft slipping of a hand along the barrel of a gun. But nothing formed itself clearly upon his consciousness. Of course, he hadn't heard anything. Of course, it was merely his imagination.

No, it was not his imagination. Beasley Nichol knew the ways of the imagination. He had lived by its use. The imagination unwilling did not tend to lift on end his luxurious growth of black hair, or leave his body clammy with cold sweat. It was not his imagination. Danger was somewhere on the mountainside; it was somewhere close to him. There was a threat even in the

stillness that enveloped his waiting. He stood still, all of his alertness poured into vision and hearing. Whatever it might be it was behind him. And there *was* something! He knew that there was something. He didn't turn around. Such a move would betray him. He thought he'd better be moving on. There was too much danger there and it was too close to him. Nothing was to be gained by waiting. Keep moving. Whatever it was, get it over with.

Suddenly there sounded from the scrub pine to his left the clear fresh joyous trill of a mockingbird. In all the years of his boyhood Lieutenant Nichol had heard mockingbirds singing in the grove about his Alabama home. Almost daily he had heard them sing. They had sung for the very joy of living. Their song was music that he had learned to love: fresh, clear, uplifting. He felt relaxed, felt that danger no longer threatened. The song of a mockingbird had turned it aside. He peered through the boughs to get a glimpse of the bird but he could not find it. Then again the mockingbird ran its trill, its notes liquid and clear against the quiet of the mountainside. The bird was on the opposite side of the scrub pine. He could almost see it but not quite.

There grew on the screen of Lieutenant Nichol's memory the mockingbirds that had sung for him in Alabama, lovely in shape, quick and graceful in movement, tawny-colored birds with gray backs and the under parts grayish white, with blackish wings bordered in white. But that was long ago. How long it had been since he had seen one; how long since he had heard one sing! But then maybe not so long. Mockingbirds were plentiful and sang freely. He had been too intent on other things to listen. It was strange that this one would impress him so now.

He stood there, his eyes searching for the bird, his peril forgotten. He moved a step to the left for better vision of the scrub pine. Then in the air about him was a quick curious *biss* against a background of sudden sharp thunder.

Lieutenant Beasley Nichol had been an actor, had played roles on the stage. Cues were a phase of his life. For him one of life's fittest answers was the proper recognition and acceptance of a

cue. Cues had been built into his nature by stern discipline. Often his body would answer a cue before his mind grasped the meaning of it. It did then, there on the mountainside. He fell to the ground, patterning his fall after the manner of Laertes, slain by Hamlet. Of all the falls he had done on the stage he had most fancy for that one. It was his notion that he did it with most art. The man who had fired that shot, which but for the grace of a mockingbird's song would have found its mark, must think that it had.

Some sense, deep and faint but most compulsive, told Nichol's body what to do while his mind was still blurred with the dreadful *biss* of the bullet. He fell, not in one sudden collapse, but in Laertes' weaving, bending, swaying fall, bearing the similitude of a life answering the imperative call with great reluctance, answering with the hope of reprieve even in the last split second of allotted time.

Lieutenant Beasley Nichol lay on the carpet of leaves. His right foot quivered and then a great shudder convulsed him. It was the way he remembered it from the role of Laertes. Then his mind caught up with his body, and he knew that the scene had been saved. The hairs on his head rippled no more. Now they would play the scene out. It was time for the second player to come on the stage.

The soldier who had fired the shot came cautiously out from his place of concealment. For him the right foot of Lieutenant Nichol again quivered most convincingly, the knee drew up a bit and relaxed. The soldier stood looking at Beasley Nichol. A little sunlight filtered down through the thick summer leaves, accenting sharply the blue of his uniform.

"Well, that's another Rebel spy less," he said, speaking to the world at large and nodding his head in the consciousness of work well done.

"Quite the contrary, Captain," said Nichol. A quick spring had lifted him to his feet, and the pistol in his hand was held at an untrembling level. "The *less* could be on the other side, you know. I'm afraid, Captain, you won't live long enough to learn not to make some very simple mistakes."

The man stood there saying nothing. The look of surprise on his face faded, leaving it oddly calm.

"Sooner or later I'll learn that it's dangerous to be overeager," he said casually. "I must keep that in mind. Well, today you, tomorrow me. There's always tomorrow. You wouldn't deprive me of tomorrow, would you, Lieutenant? This is most annoying and I really must learn to be more cautious."

"I'm older at this than you are, Captain, and it's dangerous to try any inching up to me. So you'd better not try it. Go over there and sit on that log."

"I'd rather stand."

"Three minutes ago you tried to kill me from ambush. You mustn't provoke me any further, Captain. Go sit on that log."

The other man caught the menace in Nichol's tones. He shrugged his shoulders, took four steps and sat on the half-rotted log. An acorn lay trapped in its corrugations. He picked it up and balanced it delicately on the upturned palm of his hand, regarding it with brow puckered in thought, as if to him it conveyed the portents of Destiny.

"The fortunes of war, Lieutenant. I couldn't explain otherwise how I missed you. Usually I don't miss. What sort of charm do you bear?"

"If I outlive the war," said Nichol, and for all the ease of his words his alertness was not relaxed, "I shall add a mockingbird singing to my coat of arms. Why did you try to kill me? I didn't expect that. I thought murder was for an emergency."

"War is always an emergency. We've captured spies, put them where they could learn all about us, then let them escape. Of course this was an emergency. I don't like to stand behind a tree and shoot a man any more than you would, but I'm fighting in a war and when I get orders——"

"I'm wearing the uniform of the Union Army. Are you ordered to shoot your own men?"

"I knew what you'd be wearing——"

"He knew what I'd be wearing! *Can such things be, And overcome us like a summer's cloud, without our special wonder?*"

"That fits in too. We were also told that you'd spout a lot of Shakespeare."

"You continue to surprise me, Captain. How did you know that passage?"

"A lot of us Yankees have read *Macbeth*. It might surprise you how many."

"What! Precious stones among the pebbles! Again you surprise me, Captain."

"I'll surprise you once more, Lieutenant Nichol. I, too, am a graduate of Princeton."

"You know my name! Can such things be—?" Nichol had been watching the man on the log intently, his eyes following every shift of the other's eyes. Nichol had grown tense and rigid, and again the little hairs tingled as from actual contact with peril.

The peril was there. He knew it then, knew it beyond doubt. He knew in what quarter the peril was forming. The captain's eyes had drawn into too sharp a focus. Nichol crouched, jumped to one side, at the same time pivoting sharply about. The two shots sounded almost as one. The Yankee who had been standing twenty feet back of him crumpled to the ground. Before his fall was completed, Nichol turned to meet the onward rush of the Princeton graduate. Again Nichol's footwork served his purpose. A quick spring backward and sideways saved him from the bull-like rush. The butt of Nichol's pistol lifted and fell crushingly on the captain's head before he could regain his balance.

Nichol stood looking at the two men on the ground. He addressed the dead one. "I hate to kill anybody, even a Yankee, but you didn't give me a chance," he said. He turned to the other. "You're my problem now. So, you hunt in pairs. I thought you might when you kept looking past me. You're my problem now. If you were dead too it might save a lot of trouble. Well, war is a great breeder of trouble. We'll have to think of something."

Presently he did think of something. He dragged the Princeton man to the base of the scrub pine. He took from his pocket

a length of strong cord and tied the man's wrists and ankles, using a very intricate knot he knew.

"That lick on your head ought to last for another hour. Then it'll take you awhile to untie that knot even if you work fast. After that you'll have to bury him—" he nodded in the direction of the dead soldier—"or carry him somewhere. Either way it will take time. And time's what I need. Ah, Time, bearing Life in one hand, Death in the other!"

But for all his need for time Nichol dropped to his knees and systematically explored the dead soldier's pockets, searched in detail the depths of each. He found nothing there to demand his attention. But in the pocket of the living soldier he found an order issued from the provost general's office which made his eyes bulge.

Lieutenant Beasley Nichol, a Rebel scout, is believed to be on his way to Chattanooga. He was seen three days ago at Jasper, moving in this direction. He is about six feet tall and of marked muscular development. He has black eyes, and black hair which is usually worn rather long. He is a graduate of Princeton College. He has been an actor and frequently poses. He often quotes Shakespeare. This spy is alert and resourceful and has been of frequent disservice to the Union Army. He should be killed or captured if he attempts to enter Chattanooga. The situation requires that no chances be taken.

Captain Ralph Whitaker is assigned, together with such non-commissioned officers as he may choose, to guard for ten days the eastern slope of Walden's Ridge and to prevent this spy's use of that approach to the town.

I'm a far better man than I knew, said Nichol to himself. And the Yankees are finding it out. Now who was it saw me at Jasper? I too must be more careful.

But he still wasn't satisfied. He took off the man's shoes and socks. The feet looked tender. This pleased Nichol. "It will take some more time." Then he took off the shoes and socks of the dead soldier. "We're going to make you go barefoot awhile,"



he said to the captain on the ground. "It will slow you down. *I'll make assurance double sure, And take a bond of fate.*"

Carrying the two pairs of shoes under one arm, he resumed his way down the side of the mountain. Again the mockingbird, unmoved by Death beneath the tree, ran its clear sweet trill in the scrub pine.

An omen, thought Beasley Nichol. A lovely omen. How sweetly and with what rapture you sing! My dear bird, you shall be remembered in my orisons.

The mountainside was rocky and the growth thinned out so that Nichol bent his route of descent to the left. He needed concealment, at least till he reached the river. There Captain Hume Crockett and Sergeant Goforth would be waiting for him. He didn't know what lay ahead of them. One never knew what lay ahead. Perhaps their resources would be sorely tested; perhaps the unanticipated would be demanded of them; perhaps it might destroy them. This was a risk that belonged to war. Together they had outwitted the unanticipated before. They had met the unknown and defeated it. This would be merely another time.

In his pocket was a small mirror. He gazed into it and saw features that presently would have to be altered. Without doubt there were men in Chattanooga who had full description of his normal appearance and who would with infinite alertness match that description against any and all strangers. And when a bare-foot Northern captain reached the city—and presently one would—the scrutiny of strangers would spread and multiply over all Chattanooga.

He had expected to come down the mountainside without interruption. The route had been chosen for him as the safest possible way into Chattanooga. And yet he had just left, unconscious and bound, a Union soldier who had called him by name, who bore an explicit order for him to be killed or captured. From the memory the hairs bristled again. Fate might not be so kind the next time.

He came suddenly to a clearing, a slender finger of cornland that probed into the mountain's side. He climbed the snake fence that guarded the clearing and sat in thought on the topmost rail.

But not for long. He had no wish to be observed by spying eyes. He knew that his shortest route to the creek's mouth lay across this corn patch. But the corn was scrubby and parched by drought. The timber and undergrowth of the mountainside would provide better cover.

So he got down from the fence and struck through the woods. There was a sort of misty twilight among the trees, but he knew that sunlight for another hour would brighten the western slope of the mountain. How heartening it would be to feel again the solid presence of Captain Crockett and Sergeant Goforth, two most redoubtable men and most pleasing to General Forrest! Of course there would be danger in Chattanooga, terrible danger. But danger was the hourly routine of Forrest's scouts. The combined ingenuity of the three of them could outwit danger however terrible.

Nichol came to a sudden stop. Someone was chopping vigorously only a short distance away. That was strange. What occasion was there for chopping? No firewood was needed at this season. The sound of chopping meant nothing that was likely to concern him. But it might mean something he ought to know. He worked his way carefully for a hundred feet. Then he stopped and peered around the giant oak which he had used to screen his approach. He looked for a moment, then relaxed smiling. Two lads, one in his early teens, the other two or three years younger, were cutting into a bee tree. One was cutting out a section about waist-high from a hollow poplar. The other was waving a freshly lighted smudge of old rags tied on the end of a stick to fend off the outraged bees.

He'd have liked to see this pleasant episode through, but he was on a sterner errand, so he moved on. A few seconds later he stopped again. This time it was a scarecrow of a horse that stamped indifferently to frighten away the flies that pestered it. It was hitched to a ramshackle affair that had once been a spring wagon. The lads had come prepared to carry back their booty.

The vehicle stood in a vague and little used road that ran along the side of the mountain's base. Again Nichol smiled. Those boys had been barefoot. He was carrying two pairs of

good shoes. He dropped them over the rim of the wagon's bed and kept going. A broad smile fell on his face as he visualized the surprise of the boys on their return. A half mile later he stopped again, and he was not smiling then. His generosity to the boys might turn out poorly. Suppose they were caught wearing the shoes of a Union scout found dead on the side of Walden's Ridge, of another scout half-dead? It was a ghastly notion. Better have buried the shoes, precious as they were. But it was too late to do anything about it. He couldn't go back now. The twilight had thickened and purple shadows had come among the trees, but he knew that it was not yet sundown.

A stir in the underbrush caught his eye. Perhaps there was some wisp of sound. Somewhere up the mountain there was a spring. Its flow, feeble from a prolonged drought, was in part impounded in a little hollow in which ferns grew as high as one's shoulder. Nichol stepped into this and waited for the man to come up.

"All right, soldier, just remain where you're standing," Nichol said in clipped Northern speech.

The soldier started visibly but recovered himself. "Yes, sir."

"Your name?"

"Sergeant Allen Guild."

"Are you on a special mission from headquarters to intercept a Rebel spy?"

The man had recovered from his surprise. He knew his duty in such emergencies. "'Answer questions asked by no one who has not fully identified himself.' Instruction number eight, sir."

"Of course," agreed Nichol heartily. "I apologize. I'm Captain Morton Dumas of General Rosecrans' staff, now assigned to special duty."

"Yes, sir," said the reassured Guild.

"The mission on which you were sent has been completed. You, Sergeant Guild, are instructed to return at once to your command for other duty."

"Yes, sir. I'm glad to hear it. I'll go tell Captain Whitaker and——"

"I found them farther up the mountain an hour ago. They are on their way back now."

Nichol could see even in the thickening shadows the puzzled look on the soldier's face. Why the haste? The three had come together. Why not return together?

"You're to report at once to your headquarters now near Bridgeport, Alabama. Take the shortest route." He gestured in the general direction of the shortest route which was clearly away from the mouth of a certain creek, clearly away from the two Union soldiers, one lying dead, one unconscious on the mountainside.

Sergeant Guild saluted and left in the direction to which Nichol had pointed. It seemed to Nichol that he showed reluctance, but this was understandable. Bridgeport lay a long day's walk to the southwest. Even though the soldier found, as he would find, that he had been duped, it would be too late to do much harm.

Nichol came out from the ferns and walked on obliquely down the hundred or so feet of elevation. The creek was not far ahead. Presently he reached it. Its surface lay sluggish, flecked with splashes of dull light that filtered through the overhanging boughs. Nichol could see the Tennessee River not fifty yards away. He had reached the rendezvous, but there was no sight or sound of Crockett and the sergeant. Well, he would wait till midnight, as General Forrest had said; then he would rejoin the general with all possible speed. He turned so that his ears might catch sounds from the river. There was none. From Chattanooga in the distance came a vague blur of noise, but the river was silent, so still that not even the slow recurring beat of little waves against the shore ruffled the serenity of the evening.

From a tree behind Nichol a mockingbird poured out on the young night a flood of sudden song. Such was the sweetness of its singing that it moved Nichol to speak the words of Romeo:

*"It was the nightingale, and not the lark . . .
Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate tree."*

"That's him," said the voice of Sergeant Goforth from the creek not ten feet from where Nichol stood. "Wouldn't nobody else spout poetry that-a-way."

"You're prompt, Lieutenant Nichol," said Captain Hume Crockett, rising cautiously from his seat in the boat hidden by overhanging vines and undergrowth. "We've just got here ourselves. We haven't been here ten minutes."

"It wasn't a nightingale and there are no pomegranate trees in Tennessee. I used them merely to announce my arrival. What now, Captain?"

"Well now, we are going into Chattanooga and give you up to the Yankees."

"*Treason, search it out——*" He stopped suddenly, remembering that the Yankees had been told to give attentive ear to speech savoring of Shakespeare. It was something he'd have to keep in mind.

Crockett held his voice low. "We don't know who might be hearing."

Nichol let himself down the bank and stepped into the boat. He sat down on the empty seat and the sergeant's powerful stroke pulled the boat out from the shore and into the clear stream. He backed until the prow pointed to the main body of the river, whose surface, seen through the shadows, was like darkened silver. The river was quiet and no movement stirred its surface. Nothing was said until the sergeant had pulled into the stream and turned toward Chattanooga.

"The Yankees have filled up the town," said Crockett, still speaking in a guarded voice.

"There's not so many there now as yestiday," said the sergeant.

"There's enough," said Crockett.

"Where'd they go—south?" asked Nichol.

"South. Over the Georgia line, I think."

"That's the way our men went. It means a battle, doesn't it?"

"I suppose it does. General Forrest said this morning that everything about it would be an accident. Nothing done on purpose on either side. Everything would be accidental. Bed isn't happy about it."

"I don't like accidents either. Remember what Bed said on New Year's Day: 'We'll start ferrying across the river at one o'clock.' We said it would be two or maybe three o'clock. We started at noon."

"And he got across two hours ahead of schedule."

"All right. What now, Captain?"

"Let's get out of hearing," said Crockett. "I am afraid to talk here."

Goforth pulled them out into the river. Then he lifted his oars noiselessly into the boat and they drifted with the slow current. From Chattanooga the low rumble of incessant traffic formed a background of distant sound. A steamboat far up the river blew its whistle hysterically as if ordering smaller craft from its path.

"What now, Captain?" asked Nichol again.

"I wish to heaven I knew," answered Crockett earnestly. "Nichol, this time we're in a fix."

"Why? You got into town, didn't you?"

"That's what the trouble is. We'd be likely to live longer if we hadn't."

"We've been in fixes before and got out. What sort of fix is it this time?"

"Nothing for you. You're in no trouble. This is no time for you to be in Chattanooga. You're staying out."

"I wish we was," said Goforth gloomily.

"That oughtn't to be very difficult," said Nichol. "You *are* out. Just stay out. What's the matter?"

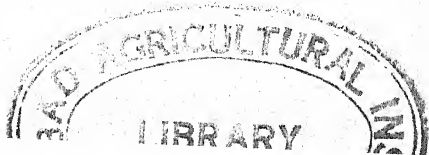
"Last night Bed sent out a patrol with orders to fetch him in some Yankees. He needed some equipment for us."

"He got it, didn't he? Go on."

"He got it," said Crockett grimly. "By midnight the patrol was back with two Yankees, and it looked like they were made to order for us. An officer on special service with a message from General Grant in Mississippi to General Rosecrans, and a guide who used to live in the Tennessee mountains——"

"The very image of Goforth, no doubt."

"No doubt at all; also no doubt about my likeness to the offi-



cer. General Forrest's unsealing department opened the message. It was in a code that none of our people could touch. The general had a copy made of it and sealed it back. And that's how I got to be Captain Bronson Curry of General Grant's command. I got his uniform, too."

"And who did the sergeant get to be?" asked Nichol.

"Corporal Jess Moon," replied Crockett. "Bed said for us to deliver the message to General Rosecrans in person and see what happened. He said for us to get you into Chattanooga if we could. He'd found that things turned out right when we were together. We were to get him word if anything happened. We were to stay in Chattanooga till he sent for us or things got so hot we couldn't stay."

"Right now they ain't chilly enough for me to tell it. I'm for staying out while we got a chance," said Sergeant Goforth gloomily. "I don't see no sense in going back."

"I'd feel better out too, but I'm not half so bad scared of General Rosecrans as I am of Bed Forrest—though we didn't get to see Rosecrans. He was away somewhere and we had to give the message to Colonel Palmer of his staff. Bed thinks the Yankees are doing some heavy planning right now and Chattanooga is the best place to find out about it. Bed wants to know what it is. No, we'll go back."

"I thought we would," said Goforth.

"Well, what was it went wrong?" asked Nichol. "You said something did."

"Something did. Bed gave us our orders and rode off. Just after that I had a notion we ought to get another look at the prisoners. So late this afternoon the sergeant and I made them a visit. Good thing we did, too. We got a chance to study them some more."

"Unhappier fellers I never set eyes on," added the sergeant moodily.

"Well, Old Eagle Eye here—I beg your pardon, Corporal Moon—spotted something suspicious in a crack in the wall and fished it out and it was another note to General Rosecrans that Bed's fine-comb squad had missed. We put it with the other

message and started for Chattanooga. We ran into the first pickets ten miles from Chattanooga. We showed them our credentials and said we were in a hurry. We'd got by three sets of the pickets when Sergeant—I mean Corporal Moon—thought of something that I ought to have thought of myself, only I was trying to think of something else. We ought to see what was in that second message to Rosecrans—and we did and that's what is troubling me. It said that the message was so important that a duplicate was being forwarded by a Lieutenant Phonse McClure, who would travel to Chattanooga by an entirely different route. Probably both messengers would get through, certainly one ought to."

"How the plot thickens!" said Nichol. "Any sign of McClure yet?"

"We're still alive," Crockett answered grimly.

"Which you might not remain long following the arrival of McClure. Good old Phonse! Now that you're out of Chattanooga, why not stay out?"

"You know the answer as well as I do. Bed Forrest wants us in Chattanooga. Bed wants to know what that message said. Bed wants to know a lot of things. Bed is downright inquisitive. So the sergeant and I are staying in Chattanooga. We've got passes and a place to stay. We'll have to take the risk of McClure showing up."

"What about me?"

"I guess you'd better go back to General Forrest and tell him how things are. Chattanooga is too tight now for anyone without the proper papers."

"No idea at all when or where this other messenger will approach the town?"

"Not the slightest. Even if we could get you safely in—and I doubt if we could—their trap would close on three instead of two. You stay out. There's too good a chance of McClure getting here."

"I wish I could help."

"I know you do, but it's too risky, entirely too risky. No, you go on back and report to Bed. Tell him what has happened.

Tell him the sergeant and I will try to handle things. I guess we'd better put him ashore, Sergeant."

"That's what I thought we'd do."

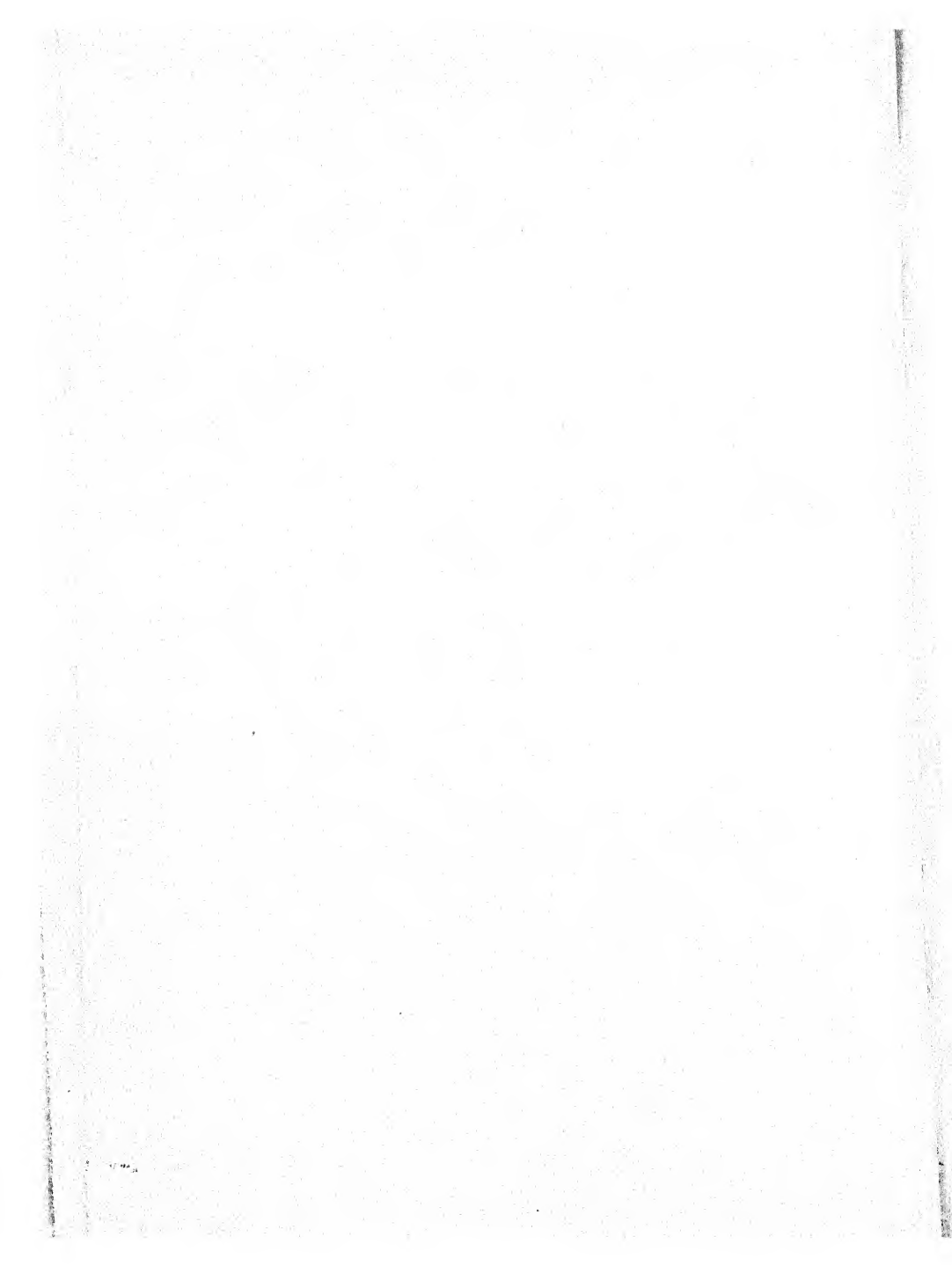
The boat edged into shore and Beasley Nichol stepped out, holding onto a sapling.

The boat backed away and turned upstream. Nichol stood there in the dark, considering what course he'd take, where he would go. Suddenly, a mockingbird not fifty feet away poured forth a flood of song.

"An omen," said Nichol, "a lovely omen of happier days to come."

PART II

A MOCKINGBIRD SANG
ON THE BANK OF CHICKAMAUGA CREEK



A Mockingbird Sang on the Bank of Chickamauga Creek

GENERAL NATHAN BEDFORD FORREST and his "critter company" marched southward along the decrepit turnpike that at times skirted Chickamauga Creek. There was the oppressiveness of early September in the heat that distressed horse and rider alike; not only horse and rider but all living things. A prolonged drought ravaged the land. The route of march the day before had been inland and had yielded little water for man or beast, and some of the soldiers had bivouacked at nightfall with the torture of thirst in their throats. There was, such as it might be, an ample supply of food for the soldiers in the wagons that rattled and bumped and careened along the dusty road. But the rations for the tired horses were becoming disturbingly scanty. The roadside grass which they were wont to nibble when not actually en route was burned to a crisp. Some of the trees and shrubs along the way were wholly barren of leaves and stood revealed in a winter starkness. From others the dead and drab leaves drifted to the ground with slow and monotonous regularity. More than once during the long afternoon General Forrest's horsemen broke ranks to let a countryman through who was driving his little herd of scrawny cattle to drink in Chickamauga Creek.

The army was in no special hurry. It had time enough at its disposal to afford some show of graciousness to the poor people along the way, farmers whose lives at the best were hard and grim, filled with drudging labor, but who then greatly yearned for some little feeling that kindness among men was not wholly dead.

"Let 'em through," said General Forrest. "There isn't anywhere we got to get to by night." He turned to the farmer. "Hope we have rain soon. Drive 'em across, brother." The farmer touched his ragged hat and with shambling gait drove his cows through the gap in the ranks.

"And that's the solemn truth," General Forrest said to Colonel Biddle who sat on his horse by him. "First time since I been a soldier I didn't have to be somewhere by sometime. All they want is for me to protect the main army and they don't tell me where it is. Never did know as little about what's goin' on as right now. Well, I guess we better be travelin'. Just give us time. We'll show up somewhere."

The column moved on. Heavy clouds of dust lifted along the entire line of march. It settled on the sweating horses, and the faces of the cavalymen were hidden behind a mask of pulverized clay and limestone mixed with sweat. It inflamed the eyes and roughened the throat and gave the feel of cleanliness hopelessly lost. The unfriendly sun burned a coppery red as it slowly fell toward the mountains lying to the westward. It was the longest period of dryness in the memory of the section's oldest people. Chickamauga Creek—the River of Death, the Indians had called it with a grim glimpse ahead—had dwindled to a flow at times compressed to the size of a large man's thigh, but this fed the long limpid pools that composed the main body of the creek.

Even so, its sound as it rippled along a shallow and stony course was like music to all creatures beset by thirst. Word had been passed among the soldiers to watch out for snakes whenever they stopped for a drink of water from the creek. It was a wise precaution, for snakes by the hundreds had crawled out of the parched fields and thickets to the moist and friendly banks of the Chickamauga. Not only snakes but all life had moved to the neighborhood of the creek to stay until the rains came.

Early that afternoon during a brief halt a company of soldiers had taken four large raccoons from a tree by the creekside. One of the company was an expert marksman with "throwing rocks," and the raccoons were easy targets. The soldiers had dressed them, and the meat was at that moment the sole item of freshness in their supply wagon.

"Coon meat ain't so good in September," remarked one of the soldiers, "but I got so I ain't very particular. I think right now I'm in the notion to like it fine."

"I tell you what we'll do—we'll make burgoo out of them coons," said Corporal Syracuse Judd from Georgetown, Kentucky. "I've seen 'em use coon in burgoo."

"What's burgoo?"

"Sumpin you make outa spiled coon meat?" inquired Private Wash Jackson from Eagleville, Tennessee.

"Some folks don't ever learn anything during their natural borned days besides being teetotal ignoramuses as long as they live," said Corporal Judd loudly. "Yes sir, we're goin' to make burgoo outa this coon meat that'll be dee-lightful to the taste and health-givin' to the innards. It's sumpin that'll make good soldiers out of sang diggers or Ree-publicans. I say they's Yankee blood in anybody that acts disrespectful about good coon burgoo."

"I didn't jine the cavalry just to listen to argyfyin'," said Corporal George Washington O'Donnell from Paint Lick, Kentucky. "But I just as well have. That's all I hear. Now, me, I was raised on burgoo. They started feedin' me burgoo when I was nine days old and you can see for yourself it made the best man in Bed Forrest's army out o' me." He waited for his comrades' appreciation of his modesty to die away, which took some time. "But as I was saying, it takes more 'n prime coons to make real first-rate burgoo. It takes time, lots o' time. Never a spoonful o' burgoo went in my mouth that hadn't been cooked for five hours. This isn't burgoo you're talking about. It's just plain coon stew. Still," he added most plaintively, "I've fell a lot in Bed's war. I've et things I never heard of befo'. I'll eat it."

"Looka yonder," yelled a soldier astride a flea-bitten gray horse. Their eyes followed his finger. More coons, three, four, five, lying flattened out on the branches of a sycamore tree that half spanned the creek.

Another soldier was calling out and pointing. More coons. The place was swarming with them. Corporal Judd was ever a man of action. He spurred his horse to Colonel Biffle's side.

"Colonel, please, sir, there's a lot of coons in them trees. If

the colonel can spare the time they make mighty good fresh meat."

The colonel looked and his keen eyes saw clearly the promise of fresh meat. His eyes twinkled a bit. "How're you going to kill them, Corporal? I doubt if even you could talk 'em to death. And remember, no shooting. Those are orders from General Forrest himself."

Corporal Judd remembered and he had his answer ready. "It's Corporal Ed Wheeler, sir, that I was thinking about. He's the rock-throwingest man I ever saw. He took a pile o' rocks and licked the whole Yankee Army one time at Triune. He'll get them coons. Please, Colonel."

"Oh, all right," agreed Colonel Biffle. He remembered the episode at Triune. It hadn't been quite the entire Northern army but instead two of its soldiers that Corporal Ed Wheeler had routed. He had wandered away a hundred yards or so from his comrades hoping to find blackberries when he suddenly came upon two fully armed blue-clad soldiers, also out for fresh fruit. There was no reticent voice in General Forrest's command, but no voice in it could match the mighty yell that Wheeler unleashed at the slightest excuse. He unleashed it then. The yell was sudden, long and loud. The two Yankees stood paralyzed. But not for long. A rock which Wheeler had grabbed from the roadside struck one of the men on the shoulder. He went down, but a second later he was up and in full retreat, a few steps behind his comrade. At brief intervals rocks whizzed dangerously close to them.

"Next time I catch you around here I'll take aim," yelled Corporal Wheeler. By then his comrades had reached him, but they caught only momentary glimpses of the fleeing Northern army, fully resolved that there would be no next time.

So, Corporal Ed Wheeler was sent for and presently the raccoons were falling from the trees like ripe apples in a heavy wind. Most of them were only stunned, but soldiers stationed beneath the trees finished what Wheeler had begun.

A clatter of hoofs sounded from the front and General Bedford Forrest rode up, reining his horse to a sudden stop. "What

do you think this is?" he yelled. "Some sort o' Irish Fair? You're blocking half the army."

Colonel Biffle explained that the men wanted a mess of fresh meat and this was their means of getting it.

"I've given you orders about firing guns. Who shot them coons? Who shot 'em, I say? I'll court-martial him."

"Nobody has shot a gun, General. Corporal Ed Wheeler did it with rocks."

"You mean Fried Pie killed them coons? I'm glad he can do something besides steal Yankee wagons."

"Wheeler's a regular champeen at rock throwin', Ginral," said Judd, Wheeler's companion in wagon stealing.

"Oh, he is! Pretty easy when they are right close up. I reckon I could do it myself at ten feet. How about that one yonder?"

Crouched in a fork high in one of the sycamore trees was a raccoon, obviously the patriarch of all the raccoons in the Chickamauga country.

Corporal Ed Wheeler's fourth rock found its mark and the coon plumped heavily to the ground. General Forrest regarded the corporal in grim approval.

"All right, Fried Pie," he said, "maybe that was an accident, but if it wasn't I'm goin' to assign you to John Morton's artillery. I'll tell him to let you take the place of two of the best cannon he's got."

General Forrest regarded the sun thoughtfully. He looked at Chickamauga Creek. "We are not going anywhere in particular. We don't know anything in particular. There isn't anything to do in particular till our great generals make up their minds. We'll just camp here for tonight. If you men can find some more coons we'll celebrate. Might be the last time for quite a spell. But if a one of you shoots a gun I'll hang him. And I don't want any loud hollerin'. Everything's got to be quiet as a graveyard. We're goin' to be moving by sunup tomorrow. Pass the word."

The word was passed and received joyfully. The soldiers watered their horses from pools along the creek, then fed them scanty rations of grain. There followed a great searching of the

trees along the creek for more raccoons or any other fit ingredients for the epic stew that the men had envisioned. Their search was rewarded. More raccoons were spotted, so many that the arm of Corporal Ed Wheeler grew weary, but his achievements were firmly entrenched in the army's story and song. Some groundhogs, some squirrels and a lot of rabbits were found and added. The soldiers didn't molest the skunks except to scare them away, and now and then a frightened fox galloped unharmed to freedom. All up and down the creekside smoke lifted lazily from fires beneath kettles in which simmered a strange concoction of onions, potatoes, pods of red pepper and fresh meat from Chickamauga Creek. The men crowded joyfully about the kettles.

"Don't hurry it," shouted Corporal Judd, true to the ideals of Middle Kentucky. "Hold it down. You can't hurry burgoo. If you tried you'd make it taste like sumpin from Tennessee, or mebbe Indiany."

"That's what's wrong with folks from Kentucky," said Private Jackson. "That is, them that's still alive, and I must say there ain't many. They got that starved look from waiting for the burgoo to git done."

"Now listen here, that ain't what I said a-tall. I didn't say burgoo's fattenin'. It's mind vittles, that's what it is. Now, you take me——"

"Then I ain't techin' it," said Private Jackson firmly. "If that's a mind Judd's got I'm bein' keerful."

"Now me, I don't have no truck with highfalutin names," said Private Burton Jones from North Georgia. "I say it's plain coon meat and I'm a-eatin' a right smart. Coon meat's the fightin'est meat they is. Oncet I et a helpin' o' it and whupped three o' them rascally Vaughans afore sundown. Trouble with this war, we've got low on coon meat."

"Let 'em enjoy themselves," said General Forrest to Colonel Biffle. "I think there's trouble ahead." The general sat on a log, his face moody in the uncertain light that played on it from the fire. General Forrest picked up a dead stick and broke it with a sharp snap.

"All I know," he said after a while, "is that Bragg is out of Chattanooga and Yankees are in. And now, I hear, they're mostly out again. But where's Bragg going now that he's out? He can't move out to the edge of the town and just sit there. He can't go west, and he can't go north. He's got to hold onto his railroad and that means he'll go south. But all the time he'll have it in the back of his head to get back to Chattanooga. Now all the Yankees aren't in Chattanooga and they ain't going there and a lot that were there aren't there now. Mebbe five thousand, mebbe less. What about the rest? My guess, they're going to try to get our railroad. Nothin' else would have a grain o' sense. And that means hell not thirty miles from here. My guess is Bragg can lick 'em if he will make up his mind to do it. It's a shame the way that man piddles around. He's liable to piddle us into a lot of trouble. I'd . . . a . . ."

He picked a dead limb from the ground. "But there's—" he snapped a dry stick in half—"but there's no need of going into that. I suppose we got to learn to take this war the way we find it. That's the way I'm takin' it, but it isn't my way!"

Colonel Biffle very discreetly remained silent. General Forrest stared at the embers for a while. Then he spoke again suddenly, sharply and harshly as was his wont when greatly preoccupied.

"I don't like to be in the dark when I oughtn't to be. And I certainly oughtn't be in the dark now. If Jefferson Davis or Braxton Bragg has a plan they're as silent as the tomb about it. I don't believe they've got one. Looks to me like they're trusting ever'thing to God Almighty." He picked up another stick, snapped it and continued: "I haven't had a word from Chattanooga since our troops started clearin' out and it's time for me to be hearin'. I don't suppose they've chased the Prophet out yet but I haven't heard from him since last Tuesday and usually I hear oftener 'n that."

"The Prophet? Who is the Prophet? I don't think I ever heard you mention him before."

"I've been careful not to talk about him much, might be dangerous for him. I reckon I can trust you, Biffle, you've got sense. Besides you and me were born in adjoinin' counties. There don't

five people in the world, besides you and me, know about the Prophet. I don't know much about him myself. I suppose he's a preacher. He acts like one. He's powerful with the Scriptures and he can recite them by the chapter. He's been with me since before Fort Donelson. He stayed in Nashville three months and while he was there we called him the Fiddlin' Man. He can fiddle as good as Pat O'Grady's second cousin and he fiddled the Yankees out of a lot of secrets the summer he was in Nashville. He was a lot o' help in Nashville. Ever' now and then he'd disappear and I'd give him up as a deserter. Then he'd show up with news that'd curl your hair. Now we call him the Prophet. He's a natural-born spy. I figured that sooner or later the Yankees would take Chattanooga so I sent him down there last spring. He goes up one street and down another recitin' Scripture and prophesyin', and you can hear him a mile off. He looks a lot like I imagine the Prophet Elijah did, and he talks just like he looks. The Yanks are goin' to hatch up a lot of devilment in Chattanooga and I'm dependin' a lot on him to get me word about it."

"How'll he get the word to you?"

"Mostly he arranges that. He's a mighty handy fellow at arrangin' things. And then I got three other men there—three if I haven't had no bad luck; anyhow two—and they're as smart as any Tennessee horse jockey; yes, sir, they're mighty clever fellows. I ought to be gettin' word soon about what's going on in Chattanooga." He sat for a while, idly playing with an oaken twig. He snapped it and spoke again: "But what good'll it do if I hear ever'thing that happens in Chattanooga and we haven't got a plan to use it in?"

The soldiers came then bringing the first tin bowls of burgoo for General Forrest and Colonel Biddle. The general dipped his spoon tentatively into the mixture. Plainly he wasn't any too sure about it. He lifted his eyes to the men. He saw that they were watching him intently. He raised the spoon firmly to his mouth and continued lowering and raising the spoon until there was nothing left in the bowl.

Said Corporal Syracuse Judd, standing near, "Won't you have another helpin', General Forrest? We got plenty."

General Forrest hesitated only a brief second. "I'd like some more if there's enough to go around. What did you say the name of this charming dish is?"

"Burgoo, sir," said Corporal Judd.

"Critter-company burgoo," said Corporal Ed Wheeler. "They call this army the 'critter company.' We thought up the burgoo. Let's call it that."

"I saw the critters that went in it," said General Forrest. "Suppose we call it just 'critter burgoo.'"

There was some commotion down the road, and in a minute a soldier came and spoke to General Forrest. "There's a courier says he's from headquarters looking for you, sir. Shall I bring him?"

General Forrest arose from the log and saluted sharply. "Bring him here," he said.

The courier came leading his foam-flecked horse. "From General Bragg, sir. I'm Lieutenant Stephen Cawthon."

He handed General Forrest an envelope. The general read the message by the light of the fire, stood for a moment in thought, then read it through again. He carefully folded the message and put it into the pocket of his blouse. He bowed to the messenger.

"Say to General Bragg, sir, that his orders will be obeyed very promptly. Feed your horse before you start back." He spoke to Corporal Judd: "I expect Lieutenant Cawthon is hungry. We can't let a good man like the lieutenant famish on our hands tonight. Do you have any of your special, absolutely guaranteed Yankee poison left?"

"It's name is critter burgoo," said Judd a trifle formally. "You said so yourself, General. Yes, sir, there is plenty for the lieutenant."

He served Lieutenant Cawthon. The first taste left him puzzled. An inquiring look overspread his face. "What's this?" he asked. "Tastes funny."

"It's sumpin special we thought up ourselves, being right gifted that-a-way. We aim to win the war with it. Makes a feller want to fight."

"It don't me. Feel peacefuller 'n I've felt in a year." Cawthon puckered his brow to help identify the taste but gave it up. "This stuff ain't specially hard to eat. I've tried worse. Can you spare another helpin'?"

He sat waiting for his horse to finish eating. The night was dark, and very still except for the voices and stir of the soldiers, and the lazy shift and stamp of their horses. There was no wind, merely a soft and aimless stir that touched the cheeks of the soldiers and whispered gently among the leaves. The fierce heat of the day had changed to the velvety freshness of night. There was no cloud, and a friendly moon filled the world with soft light. The gentle ripple of the water over a ledge in the creek bed was music. The messenger mounted his horse and rode away.

"Bragg's on the move at last," said General Forrest, "though whether he is advancing or retreating or both, I can't say. Whatever it is he's doing he wants us to help." He beckoned to his adjutant to come to his side. "We move at sunup. Spread the word. Get it to every company. I don't want anybody showing up an hour by sun." He turned reflective eyes on the soldiers up and down the road. "I like to see them have a good time. Good for the spirit."

The soldiers were having a good time. There was excitement in their drawling voices and spontaneity in their laughter. They would remember long the episode of the critter burgoo. The adventure would furnish material for the fine art of storytelling for a generation.

Corporal Judd assumed a dramatic pose. "Listen," he said, "listen here, you second-rate plow hands that got promoted to the service of your country by mistake. It's your chance to start livin' a nobler life." He extended his pose. "What was it that made Gawge Washington such a great general? I'll tell you what it was—burgoo! Read your history books. What was it made Dan'l Boone—?"

"Burgoo!" his comrades shouted in chorus.

'Burgoo's right. Give Dan'l a mess o' burgoo and the Indians didn't have a chance. Why, one time at the Battle o' Bunker Hill he killed——"

"A coon," yelled Private Jackson.

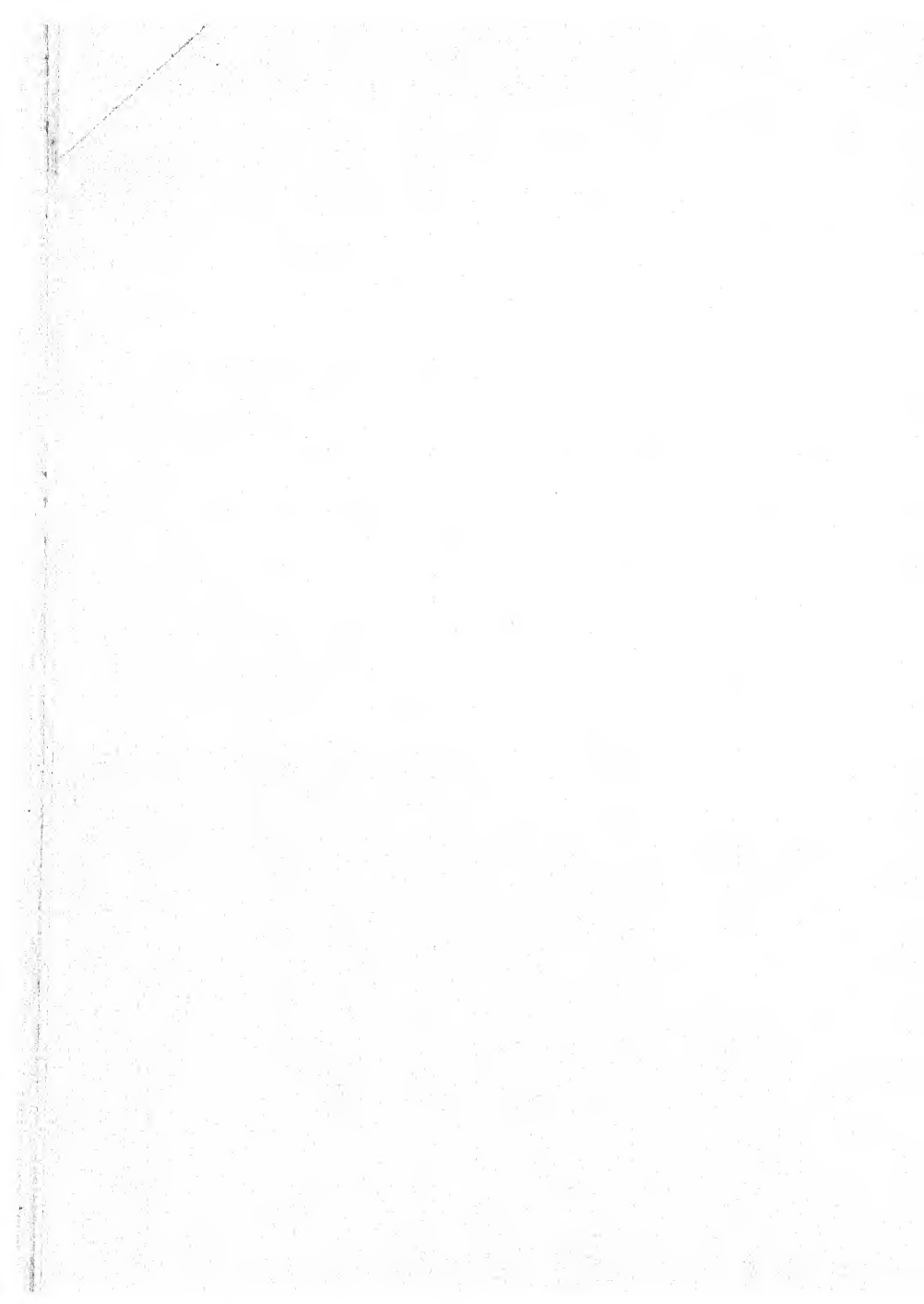
"I didn't know you was there, but that's right, and they made burgoo out o' it, and then what was it happened to the redcoats? Read your history books."

"I read mine and it said the coon bit Dan'l," a soldier called out, "and he went mad and bit the redcoats."

"You read the wrong book. Mine tells how Dan'l got nobler and nobler and run the French and Mexicans out of the country. But it's plain you ain't interested."

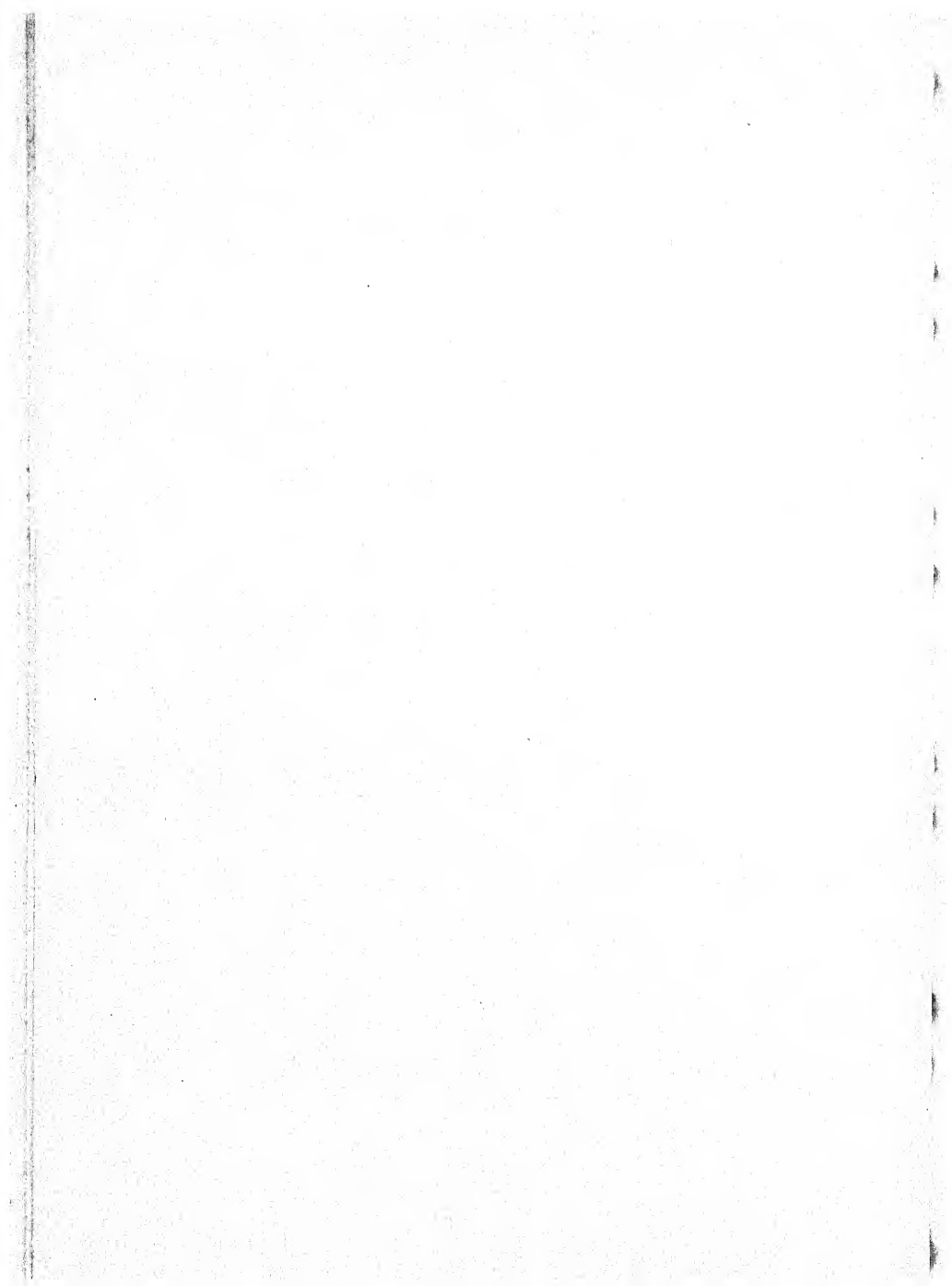
General Forrest and Colonel Biddle stayed awhile longer. When they went off the army had heard that it was to move, and to move with purpose, at sunup. It was time to sleep. Tomorrow would be a hard day. Ten minutes later the men were sleeping soundly. Nothing disturbed the almost solemn quiet of the night except the unhurried *swish* of the horses' tails, the random stamping of their feet and the gentle rippling of the water of Chickamauga Creek.

Then a mockingbird in a tree high above the pools of Chickamauga Creek burst into sudden song. Untroubled by war, apart from the destruction and terror that littered the trail of war, knowing nothing of man's inhumanity, knowing naught but a joyful world and the blessedness of life, it poured out its ecstasy upon the quiet night air. And, as it sang, far to the southward sounded a rumble that grew and echoed and sank away. Somewhere, with cannon, man searched for his enemy.



PART III

A MOCKINGBIRD SANG
IN CHATTANOOGA



A Mockingbird Sang in Chattanooga

A NEVER-ENDING line of Union troops poured into Chattanooga. They marched in from the west, climbing laboriously the westward slope of Lookout Mountain, descending with equal prodigality of labor the eastern side, tired and dusty and thirsty men who hadn't in a month, except while crossing the Tennessee River, had their fill of water; men whose every muscle ached from fatigue; men too tired to turn their eyes from straight ahead or to care much what they were passing. They found a dusty road at the base of the mountain and marched by it into Chattanooga.

They came into Chattanooga in an unbroken, uninterrupted line of march. A pitiless sun burned down on them, and their faces, where they showed through the dust, bore the appearance of something scorched. They marched on through the town to their encampment in the level bottoms near the river. When they got there they found no relief from the exhaustion which enveloped them, for awaiting them were all the chores which an army can devise for tired soldiers.

"What are we going to do now?" one private in the ranks inquired of his neighbor. "They say the Rebs must be to Floridy by now the way they was going the last time anybody saw 'em. I hope we ain't going to chase them that far."

"I'd feel better if I knowed for certain the Johnnies was that far off. It's the God's truth when I say it wouldn't do me no harm never to see another."

"It ain't like 'em to keep goin'," said a third. "My notion is, the Rebs think fightin' is fun. I don't. I'd rather plow in a new

ground with a team of oxen. And that's exactly what I wish I was doing this minute."

"Leastwise you'd get water to drink."

They talked no more. They were too tired. The unending lines of soldiers kept on coming into Chattanooga. But if they expected a period of rest they were sorely disillusioned. On they were marched to the place set apart for their encampment. There the sun without restraint poured its heat on them while they pitched tents and did the thousand things which officers casually regard as justification for the existence of privates. But at least they could rest awhile later.

Another illusion. Early the next morning they marched southward out of town, the new sun glinting dully on their rifle barrels. They tried to sing, but their voices cracked and trailed off into inconsequentiality. That dreary crossing of Lookout Mountain had drained the song out of them, had all but drained life out of them. They had hoped to stay in camp at least long enough to gain back the buoyancy that a month of unceasing toil and strain and marching had taken from them. Nobody told them where they were going and they had little idea except that it was south, south, south, all the time south, and that the sun grew hotter and the dust thicker with each mile.

"You got any idea where we going?" a soldier asked the comrade marching by his side.

"Georgia, I reckon." The man was so tired that he used words sparingly.

"It's my idea we're there now. We got any chance o' catching the Rebs?"

"I hope not. Anyhow, I've got no business with them. Not while I'm feeling like this."

"I don't see a bit of sense in all this. It's my idea, General Crittenden thinks we need the exercise. There's nothing else I can think of."

They marched on, sullenly, silently, doggedly, and their tired feet and legs and back and shoulders protested against every step. The dust hung about their march in solid sheets, and they drew it into their lungs with every intake of breath. And water was

scarce, and the sun drained from their bodies the very juices of their existence.

Heavy clouds of dust hung over all the country from Chattanooga south to Broomtown Valley forty miles away; from McLemore's Cove east to Dalton; from Ooltewah west to Jasper. The armies were marching by a pattern of intricate and bewildering design. General McCook of the Union Army's Twentieth Corps had marched too far to the southward. Now he was marching wearily back. General George Thomas' Sixteenth Corps was marching eastward through Stevens Gap into McLemore's Cove. General Bushrod Johnson's division of Confederates were marching west by south from Ringgold to Lafayette. But after three hours of forced marching something happened and he turned and marched back. Once back at Ringgold, he turned again to the west. Burnside's Yankees were moving south from Knoxville. General Buckner's Confederates were moving south from Loudon. General Forrest's cavalry galloped everywhere, guarding the armies in gray, snapping at the heels of the armies in blue. But that was all. As far as he could see nobody was doing anything by plan.

Everywhere dog-tired men were marching, marching; everywhere confused generals were giving orders and countermanding them. In the sky a coppery sun burned down on the soldiers, dried them out, sucked from them the essences of their strength. Move and checkmate, advance and block, feint and maneuver—and every move adding to the inevitability of disaster for all.

2

Captain Hume Crockett and Sergeant Goforth sat in their room at Mrs. Whitesides', sat and waited. There was nothing else to do. Colonel Palmer had told them that General Rosecrans would likely wish to see them when he rode back into Chattanooga. The colonel didn't really know when that would be. It was possible at any time. There was, however, a great deal of movement down beyond the Georgia line. No one seemed to know quite what was going on and General Rosecrans was

needed on the scene. Therefore until further notice Captain Curry and Corporal Moon should remain within reach. They would be sent for when General Rosecrans returned.

They sat by a small window that opened in a small bay to the south with a narrow panel opening onto Cedar Street in the front. The hot and oppressive winds came through it and made the room all but unbearable. The traffic on the street was light. Now and then soldiers would pass in pairs or squads. There was a trickle of civilians along the streets.

"Where's everybody gone to?" asked the sergeant.

Crockett looked at him and then at the walls of the room, but said nothing. Goforth understood. They didn't know what ears might be close to those walls. Their speech would have to be tempered to the possibility of being overheard. Every word spoken by them should bear unmistakable likeness to the roles of Curry and Moon.

For a long time they sat in silence looking through the window on a world distressed by heat and dryness—and war. There was a knock at the door and Mrs. Whitesides came into the room. She stopped just inside the door and stood, arms folded, looking at the two men. She was tall and angular. Her stringy graying hair bore few traces of discipline. Her nose was large, coarse-grained and flaring. Her jaws jutted out from her face and formed a sharp angle. Her dress was a faded and formless gray. Mrs. Whitesides always surprised a stranger twice: once at the first sight of her eyes, luminous, bland and as naïve as a child's, and again at the first sound of her voice. By the looks of her it should have been harsh and rasping. In fact, it was soft, distinct and very pleasing. But it could be disconcertingly abrupt.

"Good morning," said Captain Curry.

"Where were you born?" asked Mrs. Whitesides.

The man of whom the question was asked had more than once continued living by the quick exercise of his wits in a crisis. This was likely not a crisis, but Mrs. Whitesides' inquiry was an odd matter. Where *was* Captain Curry born? It was a matter he had not considered.

"Pennsylvania," he said. And then quickly to divert the

woman from a desire for further details, he added, "And my friend is a true son of the Tennessee mountains."

"He looks it."

Crockett wondered whether he looked as though he came from Pennsylvania.

Mrs. Whitesides stood there, gazing with bland eyes at one, then at the other. She deliberately unfolded her arms and left the room. They heard her walk down the hall. The house grew as still as death. Surely no one else could be inside it. A squad of soldiers passed along the street.

"Do you reckon she thinks we're spies or sumpin?" asked the sergeant, smiling a bit wanly. "She makes me nervous."

"I'm going to keep an eye on us." Crockett grinned wryly. "It might be we're a bad lot. I'm getting suspicious of us myself."

"Tell me," said the sergeant, "whisper if you want to, but tell me what we goin' to do. I've got to do sumpin. Jes settin' here ain't my notion."

"We'll stay here till General Rosecrans comes back. He's a smart man. That's the sort of generals the Yankees have. He'll take one look at us and say, 'Take them into the back yard and hang 'em.'"

"That ain't funny," said the sergeant.

"Maybe it isn't. I imagined for the moment that I was Nichol. By the way, I wish that other messenger would show up. If he doesn't pretty soon, I am likely to start getting nervous too."

"Reckon he knew us? I mean, do you reckon he knew Curry and Moon in the army?"

"How greatly I long to know that, too. There might be a good reason to send strangers separately on an important mission. If he's a stranger I wish he'd come on and let us get it over with. If he used to know us, I—I don't know what I want."

"What was she askin' that for?" The sergeant's head motioned down the hall toward Mrs. Whitesides.

"Just a bit of friendly curiosity. Still, I don't mind telling you, Sergeant, that for a second I had a cold chill. What in the world is that?"

That was a hoarse shouting voice so far down the street the

words were not intelligible. They moved closer to the window, and then the voice grew louder, and they could distinguish the words.

"It's a preacher," said the sergeant.

They could see the man. He was coming down the middle of the street. He was very tall, very gaunt, very erect. His face was hidden by a heavy beard, and his head covered by a spreading black hat. In his left hand he held an open Bible, but there seemed no need for his eyes to search its pages. Its words were in his mind, and his voice, hoarse and grim, resounded in their proclamation. They could hear plainly what he was saying.

"The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money.

They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.

The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.

Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones.

Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

So had spoken ancient prophets to their erring people. There was thunder in the man's voice and a terrible sternness. In his right hand he held a long shepherd's crook with the point of which he tapped on the cobblestones the measure of his reading.

"Good heavens," said Hume Crockett, "it's the Prophet!"

"The one Bed told about? The Fiddlin' Man that we saw in Nashville?"

The captain nodded and started to answer, but at that moment the hoarse voice sounded again. The man by now was directly in front of the window. They could see how tall and rigid he was. His face was held as though his eyes were searching the sky. Two blue-clad soldiers had stopped on the walk and were

listening to him. An old woman came out of the house across the street and stood on the little front porch listening.

"Oh house of Aaron; trust in the Lord; He is their help and their shield."

"Ain't he tellin' us sumpin'?" asked the sergeant.

They heard the snap as the Prophet suddenly closed his Bible. His voice sounded louder than ever. He was no longer reading Scripture. He was preaching. "War on the mountain, war in the valley, war on the rivers, war in the streets, men a-fightin' and a-slayin'. The words of the Lord done come to pass. . . ."

The words dwindled out with the distance. The old woman went back into the house. The two soldiers turned about and moved on down the street. Again the two men in the front room of Mrs. Whitesides' house were conscious of the heat that burned in upon them. Again they were conscious of the menace that was all about them.

3

General William Stark Rosecrans sat in his office on Walnut Street. A pencil was in his hand and paper was on the desk before him, but his eyes were lifted to the hot world without the window. If there was resolution in the set of his face, there was bafflement in his eyes.

The general was a man of medium stature, his complexion florid from wind and sun, and his eyes were a clean gray but tinged with melancholy. There was about him a military erectness even as he sat in the chair by his desk. Four other men sat in the room with him: Colonel Wilder, Captain Barber, Lieutenant Colonel Ward and Colonel Palmer.

"This terrible heat!" exclaimed Captain Barber. "Thank God for the shade of this office! I have not known such weather. I don't see how soldiers stand it." He wielded a large palmleaf fan fiercely.

"It's a wretched time to fight a battle; from the standpoint of

weather, the worst I can imagine," said Colonel Palmer. "Soldiers will have more things to die from than bullets."

General Rosecrans brought his sad eyes back from the window and turned them upon Colonel Palmer. "I wish you would send for the two messengers from General Grant. I'd like to speak with them." His voice was mild, weary and tinged with sadness.

An orderly departed and presently he was back from the Whitesides house with Crockett and Goforth. They were given chairs in the anteroom and there they sat and waited while General Rosecrans scanned and signed paper after paper. They sat there a bit rigid, wet with sweat, awaiting the general's summons. It was likely a routine matter. Even so, everything should be in perfect order. There must be no slips. They had rehearsed their statements with fine care. A little error would prove disastrous. Each knew what he was to say—and not to say.

They had ready answers for the questions which the Union authorities would likely ask them. Their ingenuity awaited the test of unanticipated inquiries. It had served before. They sat and waited and thrust aside as best they could the heat which billowed in waves above the street outside and drove through the open window.

Said Colonel Wilder, "Have you noticed, General Rosecrans, how beautiful this place is?"

"Beautiful? This place? In the name of heaven, Colonel Wilder, what's beautiful about it?"

"I doubt if you've seen it, sir. You've been seeing dust and dusty soldiers and dusty horses and dusty wagons. But have you ridden to the Point on Lookout Mountain? Have you looked at this valley from Walden's Ridge? Have you—?"

"This, Colonel Wilder, is no sight-seeing trip," said Rosecrans sourly.

"I know, sir, and I trust I haven't neglected immediate duties. But now I have an added motive to win the war."

"Yes?"

"To win it so that I may move here to live. I couldn't do that if they defeated us."

"Move here?"

"That is my intention, sir. No place has ever appealed to me so much. Chattanooga is crude now and badly disheveled, but it has more native beauty than any town I ever saw."

General Rosecrans didn't answer. He sat tapping the desk with his pencil, his eyes on far horizons. After a while he held his pencil still and dropped his hand to the wooden surface. It was hot to the touch, and he quickly lifted his hand from it.

He said to Colonel Palmer, "The map, please. The one I had a few minutes ago."

He sat studying it, and the look on his face grew more baffled. He knew where the bulk of the Confederates were. Where were the rest? Where was Forrest? It was important to know where Forrest was. The whereabouts of Forrest would play a definite role in General Rosecrans' plans. He knew what a part of Bragg's program was, but not all of it. Bragg would without question defend the railroad. He would have to defend it. Without it he could not survive. Certainly not in this section. But what else was in the Southern chieftain's mind? General Rosecrans knew that some of his own forces were precariously placed. He knew that if Forrest were commander in chief of the Confederates, some of the Northern divisions would have to move hurriedly, even though dangerously. As it was, the hurry was not so urgent.

Only that morning General Thomas had said to his chief, "I know General Bragg. I have known him a long time. He has all the qualities of a good soldier except that of prompt decision, a fault which I think has lately been deepening. I expect him to give us time to mend our dilemmas. I'll be greatly surprised if he doesn't."

General Rosecrans took up his pencil and tapped on the table in quick recurring beats. Then he shifted his position slightly and spoke to Colonel Palmer. "See if you can find out exactly where General Thomas is and get him a message from me. I want to talk with him before night. It is important. Send in those messengers. I'll see them now."

They stood before General Rosecrans' desk. His sad eyes rested a moment on them. Then briefly they moved past the men

to the window, but they were brought quickly back to the two soldiers before him.

"You have traveled a long distance and doubtless are tired," he said courteously. "I trust that the quarters assigned you are reasonably comfortable."

"Quite comfortable, thank you, General Rosecrans."

"By what route did you come?"

"The most direct possible, General."

"Did you have any trouble with the Rebels on the way?"

"Some, sir; nothing serious."

"Where did you encounter them?"

"Near Corinth, Mississippi, sir." Crockett prayed devoutly that General Rosecrans had not noticed his momentary hesitation.

"Guerrillas or regular army?"

"I took them to be regular soldiers, sir."

"Indeed, I was not aware that any remained in that section."

"We were surprised."

"Have you been with the forces long, Captain . . . er—" his eyes dropped to a paper on his desk—"Curry?"

"Two years, sir?"

"Where did you enlist?"

"In Pennsylvania, sir."

"We have decoded the message you brought. It was very gratifying." Again he consulted a paper. "By the way, Captain, a duplicate message was sent. Are you acquainted with the bearer?"

"I do not know, sir. We were not told of it."

"That messenger has not reached here. Do you have any idea why not?"

"None at all, sir."

"By what route do you think he was sent?"

"I could only guess."

"You were dispatched the same day. He should have reached here before this. Do you suppose, Captain Curry, that he has been captured by the Rebels?"

"It is possible, sir."

"Are the Rebels adept in translating messages written in cipher?"

"I doubt it, sir."

"Were you two together all the way?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is your home, Corporal?"

"Tennessee mountains near Pikeville, sir."

"There is a good bit of loyal sentiment in that section. Have you two men worked together long?"

"Almost from the very first, sir," said Crockett.

"I wish General Grant's other messenger would get here. It is our practice to match messages when sent in duplicate. I suppose you will have to remain here for a day or two longer. Surely he will arrive by then. Stay where we can get you on short notice. Dismissed."

"I don't like it," said Sergeant Goforth, as they walked away from the house on Walnut Street. "Sumpin's funny about this. I don't like it a-tall."

"I don't read the general as freely as if he were a book myself, Sergeant."

"Don't you reckon he thinks we're spies? He acted to me like he did."

"I wish I knew what is in his mind."

The sergeant started to say that he wished Lieutenant Beasley Nichol were with them, but it came to him in time that this might seem to cast some doubt on the adequacy of Captain Crockett, so he said instead, "I'd ruther have snow a foot deep than this weather."

"He had a copy of that message translated there on the desk before him. We've got to read it, one way or another. We've got to read it."

"We got out of that mess in Nashville last summer. One time like that is all we're entitled to. Mebbe we ain't goin' to have good luck this time."

A squad of soldiers came marching down the street. The sergeant in charge waved the two men to a halt. "Let's see your

credentials," he said crisply. "We're from the provost marshal's guard."

He read carefully the credentials of Captain Curry and Corporal Moon. He looked the men over. "Where are you quartered?"

The captain told him.

"You will be returning to General Grant's command soon?"

"That would be in the usual order. Naturally we will remain here until excused by General Rosecrans."

"The provost marshal—or somebody—thinks there is need to be most watchful for spies. Sorry to trouble you." The squad proceeded on down the street.

"Spies? Spies? I'm hearing that word a lot lately. Do you suppose, Sergeant, there are some spies here in town?"

"I know one that'd sure like to be out o' town," said the sergeant.

They turned in at Mrs. Whitesides' and found her apparently waiting for them.

"Dinner's ready," she said. "I suppose you been down to General Rosecrans' headquarters."

Crockett flicked a quick glance at the sergeant. Mrs. Whitesides was worth their careful observation. She supposed too freely and well for comfort.

"Yes, that's where we have been."

"I thought that was where that soldier was takin' you in such a hurry. That was the way it looked to me. You find the general a right nice man?"

"A charming man," said the captain flicking a second glance at his companion. "We have no complaints."

"Better keep an eye on him. Sometimes big generals don't turn out so well. I've known them that didn't. Well, come on in to dinner."

Crockett's and the sergeant's eyes met. So they should keep an eye on the general. They sat down to dinner. The meal appeared ample to the soldiers but not to Mrs. Whitesides.

"What with too much war and heat and too little rain it isn't

easy to get food, and it'll get harder if things don't change. Time may come when everybody'll have to eat with the army."

"As bad as that?"

"Just about. All around here the late crop's a failure. Early things like potatoes did right well. I got a lot o' navy beans we picked in July. They won't be hardly any corn made except by hustlers that got it out real early. Have some o' this. The man that sold it to me raised it in his spring branch."

She passed a dish to the captain. He served himself heartily, Mrs. Whitesides was regarding him intently. He lifted a forkful to his mouth and ate with great relish. The sergeant too looked at the contents of the dish with the favor accorded an old friend.

"Glad you like it. It's somethin' I know how to cook. Well, I wish it was winter," said Mrs. Whitesides. "Nothin' I like better than cracklin' bread."

"Me, too," said the sergeant. Mrs. Whitesides' bland eyes moved from the sergeant to the captain, and then she shifted the topic away from food.

They finished their meal and went to their room. They sat at the window and watched the scorching street outside. Soldiers by pairs and squads passed at random intervals. Almost no one else was on the street.

The sergeant broke a prolonged silence. "I don't like this. I tell you I don't like it a-tall. Put me out on the street and I'll take my chances. Stayin' here's the same as jail. I don't like it. Besides, I'd ruther smother out-o'-doors."

"I don't like it either, but you listen to me. We must wait here to see how things turn out. Bed Forrest would like to know what that message said. Bed would like to know a lot of things. And the best way to find them out is not to cause anybody to become suspicious of us."

"They seem 'spicious already."

"General Rosecrans told us to stay here. Suppose he'd send for us and we weren't around. Of course this is a risk, but anything else would be a bigger one."

"You think they're watchin' us?"

"I haven't seen any signs of it. I don't believe anyone is watching this house, unless . . . unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless it is that woman." His head motioned to the door. "We were assigned to stay here. Why? I don't know. Maybe so she could watch us. Maybe it just happened. Anyhow she's a mighty good reason for us to stay close."

"She gives me the creeps."

"We'll be quiet and nice for a while, polite to General Rosecrans, and use our best manners on our hostess. We'll try to humor everybody."

The sergeant sighed. "That's what I thought you'd say."

"I wish that other messenger would hurry and come. I don't know what to do till he gets here. I never was so much in the dark."

"Me neither. And I got another wish. I'd like to set eyes on the lieutenant, too."

"You expect him to try to get into Chattanooga?"

"Try nothin'. You know the lieutenant. I'm expectin' him any hour now."

"You might be right. It wouldn't surprise me. Nichol can be a very determined man."

"I'd like to hear him spout a little poetry right now. It gives me a cheerful feelin'."

They sat in silence for minutes.

"You expectin' that Prophet feller to give us any help?" asked Goforth.

"Bed Forrest said he would."

"Bed don't do much guessin'. When he talks he knows what he's a-sayin'."

"I watched them down at the Yankee headquarters. They're a pretty badly worried lot. General Rosecrans was worried. Did you see him handle that pencil. Did you see how his fingers shook? They all were worried."

"Prezactly what I thought."

"There are a lot of things they're not sure about and it bothers

them. A battle, and to me it looks like an important battle, is about to be fought, and they don't quite know what to do about it. Rosecrans was an anxious man."

"That's what I thought."

"I'd trade five years of my life to know what that message said. The general said it was good news, but I couldn't see that he acted like it."

Mrs. Whitesides tapped on the door and entered the room. She stopped a pace inside the door, folded her arms and regarded them with a look which was dour and unwavering.

"So you're spies." The words came without warning. Her tones suddenly were as hard as granite.

"Excuse me, lady, but I'm not quite in the humor for joking. We are messengers sent to Chattanooga by General Grant. I supposed you knew that."

A ghost of a smile played across her face. "Never saw a Yankee yet that'd eat turnip greens like you do or that'd ever heard o' cracklin' bread. I had my notions the first time I saw you. I'm right hard to fool."

They said nothing but sat staring at her.

"While you was gone the Prophet told me he thought you was the ones. He sorta preached it out. It could be, I reckon, that you made a little mistake and said *General Grant* when you meant *General Forrest*."

"The Prophet? Then you——"

"You might say I got a tech o' Reb blood in me. My husband and two boys are a-wearin' gray clothes. And one boy was killed at Shiloh battle. I've got no love for the Yanks but they don't know it."

"They'll find out."

"Maybe not soon. They will sometime. I moved here right after the war started and my menfolks went off to fight. I guess I've helped the South a right smart, but I've been mighty careful. Plenty o' folks here ever since I came thought I sided with the No'th."

"What do they think about your menfolks?"

"I haven't ever talked about 'em. People don't know about

'em. When the Yankees came in I was ready and waiting. I'd been expectin' 'em. I'm hand in glove with 'em, as the saying is. Nobody here in town but the Prophet knows about me. What are you men up to?"

The captain looked at the woman a long time before he answered, "General Forrest sent us here."

"I reckoned he did. That's what the Prophet said. What's General Forrest want to know?"

"He wants to know any plans the Yankees may have, anything that'd be of help to him."

"There might be something. The Prophet's been helpin' out. Maybe I can."

Mrs. Whitesides went away. The two men sat in the hot room, looked at each other and waited. At sundown she summoned them down for supper. She sat at the table in grim silence, and they ate, saying no word. Then they went back to the little room which was more bearable since the sun had gone down.

The captain sat at the window and looked out at the gathering twilight. A thunderhead whose crest was bright with an overlay of gold lifted itself about Missionary Ridge, and lightning flashed a crooked path across it."

"Dry-weather lightnin'," said the sergeant.

A soldier turned in at the front gate and came up the walk to the front door.

"It's the orderly from General Rosecrans. The same one that came for us this morning."

"Mebbe we're in for trouble now," said Goforth.

"Maybe we are, and on the other hand, maybe we'll get a chance to read that message this time."

"Mebbe I can steal it. I've stole things under people's noses before now."

"Better to read it. Then they won't miss it. I remember something Nichol said once: *But screw your courage to the sticking place, And we'll not fail.* Here they come."

Steps sounded in the hall and Mrs. Whitesides came into the room followed by the orderly.

Ten minutes later they reached Union headquarters on Walnut

Street. They were immediately ushered into the presence of General Rosecrans who sat at his desk tapping its surface with his everlasting pencil and looking with his melancholy eyes into the darkness outside the window. An officer who sat busily writing at a small table looked for a brief moment at the two men standing rigidly near the door. Then his eyes dropped and he was again at work. The tattoo that the general beat on his desk sounded loud against the silence of the room. The soft rasp of dry sycamore leaves rubbed together by the slow wind that had risen came into the room. The low drone of the cicadas bore the overtones of weariness, of thirst.

After a while General Rosecrans laid his pencil on the desk and, more with his tired eyes than with his hands, motioned the two men to come forward. His tones were low but clear and steady. The eyes never wavered as they searched the two men standing before him. "You were sent by General Grant eleven days ago with a message for me?"

"Yes, General Rosecrans."

"You made the trip promptly, suffering no interruption save a minor one by the Rebels?"

"Yes."

"I am a bit puzzled. Why did General Grant go to all that trouble? Could not the message have been forwarded quite safely by telegraph wire?"

"I imagine it could, sir. All I know is that General Grant said that a telegraph line unless closely guarded its entire length could prove treasonable, and that there were places in any direction out of Vicksburg of which he could not be wholly sure."

"I see," said the general dryly. "Doubtless General Grant was right. And at the same time he sent you he sent another with an identical message?"

"I knew nothing of that until I was told about it earlier today."

"You are not acquainted with the other messenger."

"I do not know. I know some who might have been sent. Probably I don't know him at all."

"We shall see. The other messenger arrived an hour ago."

Your messages are the same. We should expect your stories to tally." He turned his eyes away from the men to the orderly. "Bring in the other messenger."

The captain hoped that the beating of his heart was not audible. The sergeant stared stonily straight ahead. They did not look at each other but each knew perfectly well the other's thoughts. It would turn out all right. It had to turn out all right. They would compound their resourcefulness and hope to outwit their enemies. They were used to living dangerously. But this time terror approached them as closely as it ever had.

The door opened and the orderly came into the room—followed by Beasley Nichol!

General Rosecrans watched them intently. The officer writing at the table lifted his eyes to the drama being played in the room. The three men knew that menace had not moved away. It had come closer. One false move, one sentence spoken out of place and tragedy would close in and destroy them. Nichol half took an eager step toward his two companions but the look in Crockett's grim eyes held him where he stood.

"Good evening, Lieutenant," said Rosecrans. "These are the men who brought the duplicate of your message. Do you happen to recognize them?"

"Certainly, General Rosecrans." Nichol moved quickly to where Crockett was standing. "Good evening, Captain." He held out his hand. Then he turned to Goforth. "Corporal Moon, I'm very glad to see you. I had no idea that you would be sent on a similar mission. I hope we can make the return trip together. Yes, General Rosecrans, these are my friends and comrades. How pleasing!"

The speech was clipped and brittle, with no suggestion of Southern softness. The officer at the table resumed his writing. General Rosecrans sat in thought. Then he said to the officer at the desk, "Make a copy of our translation of General Grant's message. I wish it sent immediately to General Thomas."

Nichol's glance met Crockett's and again each knew the other's thoughts. The officer at the table came across and took the paper General Rosecrans handed him, and again his pen scratched

across paper. The general looked at the three men standing before him.

"Oh, yes," he said. "You will wish to start back to General Grant soon. Of course." Again he addressed the Union officer. "Captain Barber, issue credentials for the return of these messengers to their command." He turned to Crockett. "You doubtless can arrange for—" his eyes sought a paper on his desk—"Lieutenant McClure to be quartered with you tonight. Tomorrow at noon your credentials will be here for you."

4

The room at Mrs. Whitesides' was pleasant enough when they reached it. A little wind had driven away the heat of the day. Goforth sat on the bed, and Nichol on a chair. There was another chair but Crockett remained standing, his brow puckered in deep thought.

"I've got to go back," he said. "We must get that message. Bed would expect me to get that message."

"Shouldn't I go too?" Nichol asked.

"Better not. I'll be back soon. If I don't come, do the best you can. Get out of Chattanooga in a hurry."

He went quietly along the hall and out the door.

"I'd hate to have been that other messenger," said Sergeant Goforth. "What happened, Lieutenant? Another Yankee have bad luck?"

"Quite," said Nichol soberly.

"How'd you find him, Lieutenant?"

"An accident. When you and Crockett left me at the river I had but one idea and that was to get to Bed Forrest as fast as I could. And I didn't know where he was. But I knew I had to get across the river. I decided to try it above the town. The Yankees were too thick below. I walked all night following the river, dodging houses. It was pretty dark but I don't believe an owl could have found any sort of boat for ten miles up the river from where you left me. Then at last I found one. Only a Yankee had found it just before I did. I hid and watched him

try to get it loose. It was chained to a tree and the chain was locked. Every now and then he'd stop and look about as if he were scared of something. I watched him awhile and then I stepped out and said, 'Can I help any, partner?' I made a mistake, one that I've usually had sense enough not to make. I sounded just like Alabama when I asked him that. He didn't catch on right away, though. He said he just had to get into Chattanooga. It was life or death with him. He was behind time already. If I'd help him get the chain unlocked—— I told him I had to get across the river too. He said he'd been trying to get across all night, but from the looks of things the army had stripped it clean.

"It wasn't much trouble to get the boat loose. I saw that he didn't know much about handling a boat, so I rowed. He asked where I was going. I told him I had been sent over the mountain on an errand and was on my way back. He got suspicious of me then and a little later I understood why. I had slipped back into my Yankee speech and he noticed the difference. I asked him where he was going, and the way he hemmed and hawed made me suspicious. All at once I knew who he was. I stopped rowing to unbutton my blouse, but really to get my pistol where I could reach it quick, grumbling about the heat as I did so. I knew that both of us couldn't get to shore. He was watching me like a hawk and somehow I sensed that he was remembering my Alabama voice. Also, he couldn't keep his eyes off my uniform. He was searching it for flaws. Time after time his eyes played over it. There wasn't any telling who we'd run into across the river, and he could give me a lot of trouble. So I decided to get it over with.

"'Aren't you the messenger from General Grant?' " I asked. He reached for his pistol but I beat him. I stayed out in the river for a while to see if anything happened ashore. Nothing happened, and I decided nobody had heard the shot. I drew in close where there were some trees and searched the poor fellow. He was from General Grant all right. I emptied his pockets and put some misleading stuff in them. Then I dropped him into

the river, got the boat to land and headed for General Rosecrans. And here I am. I'll be a happy man to see Crockett back again."

They sat in silence for several minutes.

"I wish Crockett would come back," Nichol repeated.

"If he doesn't soon we'd better be leaving too."

At that same moment the door opened and Crockett came in. They saw the look on his face and said nothing.

"I got it," he said. "I had to. I didn't have time to read it."

"I thought you would get it," said the sergeant.

"There'll be trouble any time now." Crockett's head motioned to the outside.

"Anyhow," said Nichol, "we had nothing to do with it. We've been here all the time."

"I'm sure no one saw me. Blow out that candle. They'll be looking soon."

"How are you going to get the message to Bed?"

"One thing is sure. No one of us can leave here. We've got to stay, all three of us. But I believe I know how it can be done."

He went out into the hall and they heard him rap gently on the door of Mrs. Whitesides' room. After a moment it was opened and they heard low voices. Then Crockett came back into the room.

"She'll get it to him. She didn't say how but my guess is the next person that sees it will be the Prophet."

Twenty minutes later all three were asleep. A little after midnight Crockett touched Nichol lightly on the shoulder. "They're coming," he whispered. "I heard them." There was the faintest rustling sound from Goforth's bunk and they knew that he had heard too.

A loud rapping sounded at the front door. A little later they heard it open.

"Orders from the provost marshal's office to search the house," rasped a heavy voice.

"What you looking for? You won't find anything here. Maybe I don't want my house searched."

"We've got our orders," said the heavy voice.

"Open that door and stand back," said another.

"All right, but you won't find anybody in my house but three Yankees. You aren't looking for them."

"Show 'em to us. Sometimes Yankees turn out to be somebody else. Maybe they're what we're looking for."

Steps clumped down the hall and the door was thrown open without ceremony. The beams from a lantern flicked about the room, coming to rest on the three men.

Crockett struggled to an upright position wiping the sleep from his eyes. By then the other two men were sitting up, blinking at the intruders.

"What do you want?" asked Crockett harshly.

"Maybe we want you."

"Maybe you'd better have a good reason for breaking in like this," Crockett said. "Maybe General Grant'd better like it, too. What do you want?"

"Orders from the provost marshal. Something's happened."

"What did we have to do with it?"

"That's what we got to find out."

"We came here two hours ago from General Rosecrans' quarters. We have not left."

Mrs. Whitesides spoke from the doorway. "I heard 'em come in like he said. Nobody's left."

"We got orders. Harry, see what you can find."

Harry moved quickly about over the room, holding the lantern before him and expertly inquiring into all possible places of concealment. "Let me feel o' you fellers. Don't get mean-natured. Orders. You come over here." He motioned with his pistol to Crockett.

There was something to be gained by resistance. Crockett shrugged his shoulders and moved across the room. Harry systematically explored the bunk he had vacated. The leader ran expert fingers over Crockett, emptied pockets and studied contents. He motioned Crockett back and Nichol forward and followed the same routine. Then Goforth.

"All right. We didn't find anything. Sorry to trouble you

fellers, but something happened and we got orders. Go to sleep. We might come back."

Mrs. Whitesides followed the soldiers to the front door. "You don't think those men are spies, do you?"

"The provost marshal does the thinkin'."

"You think I'd harbor them men in my house if I didn't think they was patriots? They haven't done anything to make me suspicious and you tell your general I don't want to have to get out of bed like this any more."

But by then the guard had done its duty on Mrs. Whitesides' premises and was hurrying away doubtless to search other men on other premises. Something had happened.

"You made a quick trip," said Nichol.

"I'll never have luck like that again. They had all gone from the office. Maybe they were holding a meeting upstairs. I heard voices up there. But there wasn't anyone in the general's office downstairs. One lamp was burning and a sentinel paced up and down before the door. I told him I had lost an important notebook and would like to see if I dropped it when I was there before. He remembered me and let me go in. I didn't expect to find the message but it was on the table where I had seen it. I got it, but before I did I made sure the guard didn't see me. I came back out the door, waved to the fellow and here I am."

"What will they do now?"

"Investigate us further, I suppose. We're not out of it yet. And now I need sleep."

5

A few minutes later Crockett and Goforth were again asleep. Nichol had no desire to sleep. He sat at the window and drew in great drafts of air cooled and freshened by the night. The night was still. No traffic stirred on the streets and the town below him was as quiet as if hostile armies a few miles to the southward never dreamed of conflict. The sky was clear and the stars were large and bright. Far to the south a dull low rum-

ble sounded. It might have been a cannon somewhere beyond Rossville. Or it might have been a heavy wagon striking suddenly a very rough place on the turnpike. As the far echoes died away, a mockingbird in an elm tree out in the yard lifted its voice in song. Nichol, entranced, listened to the exquisite notes poured eagerly on the eerie silence. Runs, trills, lilting strains of pure joy; sometimes a sob in the throat; sometimes a flow of notes conceived in unrestrained humor, and all fused into a midnight lyric.

"Ah!" he whispered quietly, for it had become dangerous to say a line from Shakespeare out loud.

*"The bird of dawning singeth all night long: . . .
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm;
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time. . . .
So have I heard, and do in part believe . . ."*

6

Reverend Marcus Bearden Dewitt, chaplain of the Eighth Tennessee Regiment, was a proud man on that September Sabbath morning. His young wife had come from Fayetteville to spend a few days with him or as near to him as the circumstances of war would permit.

The Eighth Tennessee was a part of General Frank Cheatham's division and its commander, Colonel John Anderson, claimed that the Eighth was "about all the division had except some other soldiers."

Cheatham's division had been hurrying ever since it moved out of Chattanooga less than a week before. It had hurried south, then it had hurried west, now it was hurrying north. No one seemed to know why or where it was hurrying or what would happen if it ever got there. The general talk among the soldiers was that there was to be a battle, and it would have to be an important one unless much of that hurrying was to go for naught.

Late Saturday afternoon General Cheatham rode a lathered

horse up to General Marcus Smith and bellowed with his fog-horn voice. "I'm tuckered out. You're tuckered out. Everybody's tuckered out and half-dead on his feet. I've got dust an inch thick in my throat. I'm sunburned to my marrow. This army is camping right here and it'll take the Secretary of War in person to move it before sundown tomorrow. I want the men given three good meals. God knows when they'll get another one! Why, bless my soul if there isn't my favorite parson! Howdy, Brother Dewitt. And isn't that fair damsel swinging on your arm the missis? Why, ma'am, your presence, besides being edifying to the eyesight, improves even this weather and makes the fair state of Georgia still prettier."

"I just couldn't stay away any longer," the blushing wife said. "So I made the trip. It wasn't much trouble."

"She's going to stay a week, General Cheatham," said the proud husband.

"That might work out fine. If the Yankees ever catch sight of her they'll want to make peace."

"That would suit me fine. I could then go back to preaching at Fayetteville."

"And I could go back to Middle Tennessee and raise good horses. But I'm afraid that's a long time off. It ain't so easy to lick the Yankees as I thought for a while it'd be. They're turning out real stubborn and mean-natured. Well, Reverend, introduce the missis to your friends. Enjoy your visit, ma'am."

General Cheatham rode away. The sun dropped low among the trees that lined the Chickamauga. The drought had laid a heavy hand on that particular part of Georgia. The trees were half-bare and the thirsty horses were lowering the pools along the creek. The dust of the day had been incredibly dense and all but unbearable, but in the late afternoon it had settled in a grayish-red veneer on fences and fields and trees and men.

The supper was according to the general's wish. It was by army standards a good supper. The soldiers ate standing or sat on logs, on rocks or on the ground, but two stools were brought from one of the wagons for the chaplain and his wife. The sun fell behind Lookout Mountain and the quiet shadows of

twilight came from out the east. On a little elevation back from the creek a man began singing. His voice was sweet and true and tuned to the twilight.

"That's Charley the Minstrel," said one of the soldiers to the preacher's wife. "Charley hurried through his supper just to get to sing."

*"The birds were a-singin' in the mornin'.
The myrtle and the ivy were in bloom.
The sun o'er the hilltop was dawnin'.
'Twas then we laid her in the tomb."*

"It's his sweetheart he's thinkin' about, ma'am," explained another soldier. "She died."

"Charley's a good boy," said a third. "He shore can handle hisse'f in a battle, but he's mighty likely to git lonesome this time o' the day. So he goes off and sings."

"Makes me feel right sad. Makes me think he's singin' to her," said the second soldier.

The men had become strangely silent. Charley the Minstrel's song, touched with yearning, rose among the trees, and by their silence the soldiers of the Eighth Tennessee showed him their sympathy.

The song closed almost with a sob, but one unmarred by pose.

"Would it be all right for me to speak to him?" Mrs. Dewitt asked her husband.

"I wish you would, honey. Charley needs some woman to speak to him."

The preacher brought Charley and presented him with proper ceremony to his wife.

"I think your song was lovely," she said.

"Much obliged, ma'am. I really am much obliged. I don't sing much. Just sometimes when I'm feelin' like it."

"Tell me about your sweetheart." She spoke the words without thinking, but some womanly awareness assured her that she had said the right thing.

"She's daid, ma'am." Charley's voice was hardly louder than a whisper.

"I know, but tell me about her. Describe her to me. I really would like to hear."

Charley the Minstrel told the chaplain's lady of his sweetheart who had lived up on the mountain in Grundy County; of the illness with which she had been stricken; of the message that with great labor had been relayed to him; of General Cheatham's thoughtfulness in arranging for leave and for a ride as far as Jasper; of the day that he was with her before she died. Charley talked haltingly at first, then his words, savory with rich mountain idiom, flowed fluently. The chaplain's wife felt the pain of his sorrow, felt the poignant joy of his memory. The chaplain very tactfully was away arranging for preaching services on the morrow. The soldiers who had sat near by had moved very quietly out of hearing.

"I wish I could have seen her," Mrs. Dewitt said at the close of his story.

"Yes'm, I'd be proud. She was mighty sweet."

Chaplain Dewitt came back to his wife and Charley rejoined his comrades. The burden that weighed on his spirit was lighter than it had been for months. He had told his tale to one who not only sympathized but understood.

7

Half after ten was the preaching hour for the Eighth Tennessee on those fortunate Sabbaths when it could arrange to have preaching. This Sunday morning was bright, and, lacking an emergency, the army would stay where it was at least till afternoon. The preacher and his wife sat on chairs on a little rise from the crest of which grew a towering pine tree. An inverted tub placed over a rotting stump served as pulpit. The men of the regiment sat on logs and, when the available logs became crowded, on the ground. They were all there, all except those assigned guard duty. Cooks had prepared rations beforehand so

that they too might attend the meeting. The chaplain was popular with the Eighth Tennessee. The regiment, with no dissenting voice, had called him to its service, and he had stepped down from the pulpit of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church at Fayetteville and answered.

He was very tall and very thin. A heavy growth of black beard covered the sides of his face and added years to his scant twenty-four. His arms and legs were long and when in motion gave an illusion of violence. His voice had a flexibility that enabled it to roar like an angry tenor lion, or coo like a plaintive alto dove. The Eighth loved equally to hear him roar against sin or coo with dovelike gentleness in favor of righteousness.

"I think I'd better give them a sermon to cheer them up," he told his wife that morning. "They're in need of cheer now and they'll need it more before this week is finished or I'm no prophet."

"They don't look downcast, Marcus."

"Part of that, honey, is put on. They're trying to keep from seeing what they're bound to have to look at. Down in their souls they are just as I am, plain scared. By the way, honey, I've got a man with one of the best hymn voices in this traveling congregation of mine that you ever heard. I think Charley's voice is pretty, but he's no good for church services. He's a lamenter like some of his kinfolks back in Scotland. See that man leaning against the tree yonder? He's positively the best hymn singer in this army, one of the best anywhere."

Mrs. Dewitt looked at the man to whom her husband pointed. "How clean his clothes are!"

"They're always clean. I never saw him dirty yet. It isn't natural for a soldier to be that clean. But just listen to him sing." Marcus Dewitt looked at the sun. "I reckon it's time to begin services."

He smiled lovingly at his wife, turned and walked to the improvised pulpit, laid his Bible on it and placed his hand on the Bible. "Brethren of the Eighth Tennessee," he said in his tenor lion voice, "come to order."

He didn't have to repeat the request. The brethren came to

order. They straightened themselves out of their slouched positions; they turned themselves about to face the preacher; most of them spat out the tobacco they were chewing.

"We'll begin our worship with a hymn. Who'll lead a hymn? Will he kindly arise and come forward?" A moment of inaction followed, of self-conscious silence. Then a half-quizzical, half-peremptory note crept into the preacher's voice. "Summer before last I was up in Fayetteville on a furlough. I got a ride back to the army with a gentleman who was on his way to join up with Frank Cheatham. He was driving a horse which he had stolen—I mean requisitioned—from the Yankees. I never saw anything like the way that man made friends with that horse. I rode with him two days and by then the man and the horse were talking to each other."

A laugh arose among the men but the preacher raised a restraining hand. "My friends, they did talk to each other. I heard them; and once I heard the horse correct the man's grammar. The man thanked the horse and promised he'd never make the mistake again. And I don't guess he ever did."

He stood waiting patiently for the laughter to subside. Then he went on: "But that wasn't what I started out to say. When the man wasn't talking to the horse and, now and then, to me, he was singing. Part of the time he sang hymns. Now I've heard lots of men sing but I never heard one with as sweet a voice as that man had. He joined up with General Cheatham, and Frank put him in charge of his wagons, and right now there isn't an army under Jefferson Davis that has its wagons as well handled, and with as few breakdowns. He gets ammunition and rations where they are supposed to go. He's kept mighty busy and this is the first time I've seen him at preaching. Now, if I was passing along and one of his wagons was broken down and he'd say, 'You climb down off that horse and help fix this wagon,' brethren, I'd do it all right. Here, something's broken down with our hymn singing and I'm telling the man who's leaning against that tree yonder and holding his hat in one hand and a whip in the other to come up here and fix it."

At that all eyes turned to the small lithe man with sandy gray-

ing hair who stood holding a black slouch hat in one hand and a driver's whip in the other. There wasn't much shape in the clothes he wore, but, as the chaplain's wife had observed, they were clean. Late the afternoon before he had washed them with minute care in one of the pools of Chickamauga Creek. The driver waited a moment in irresolution, then walked forward. As he passed a log lying at the side he placed his hat on it. Chaplain Dewitt met him at the edge of the altar space and extended his hand. The driver, still holding his whip in his left hand, clasped the preacher's hand with his right. He faced the Eighth Tennessee.

"I ain't much good at singin' no more, but it seems like I been called," he said a bit timidly but with obvious dignity. "What piece you all want?"

"You been called," sang out Private Ed Provine from his seat on a tree root. "You pick it."

"You pick one and start it, brother. We'll foller," added Corporal Bandy Doak.

The driver drew himself up a little straighter, pitched his voice somewhere back in the recesses of his throat and started the church piece that was his favorite when he drove the lead wagon of Frank Cheatham's commissary train up hill and down dale, along the creeks and through the woods, over mountain and across valley in those long and seemingly aimless wanderings through Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia.

"Oh, who will come and go with me?
I am bound for the promus land."

All the soldiers of the Eighth Tennessee knew that old stand-by of the village and country churches. The driver's voice was true and sweet and it evoked memories of home. The memories took form and it was preaching day and they were back, each man at his home church. They were standing about in the churchyard, talking casually of crops and the weather and local cases of sickness. Then inside the church a hymn would be started, tenta-

tively at first, then with greater assurance. It was the call to assemble.

"I am bound for the promus la-a-a-nd.
Oh, who will come and go with me?
I am bound for the promus land."

At that conversation had been cut off and they had moved quickly into the church, each joining in the hymn as he entered the door. There were the members of their family; there were their neighbors, all in one spirit singing.

"Oh, who will come and go with me?
I am bound for the promus land."

Mrs. Dewitt was not the only one to wipe away a tear of happy memories. They were all singing. Contagion was in the driver's voice and manner, a subtle reassurance.

"I am bound for the promus land."

Maybe their wanderings were more planned than they had recognized. Maybe they really were going somewhere. Maybe they were bound for the promus land after all.

The song drew to its close and the driver started back to his place by the tree.

"No, stay up here," said the preacher. "Take my chair. I don't need it any more and at the end of preaching we'll want another song."

He opened his Bible. "I'm going to read you from the Holy Scripture how a man tried to cure some silly fellows from a bad case of the bighead. And that's something all of us ought to keep in our minds seven days in a week. If we did, it would save us a lot of trouble. The lesson is from Job. Some men had been trying to get Old Job to do wrong. They were smart alecks and

had glib tongues, and they could argue like a Tennessee candidate for governor. Why they didn't let Old Job alone I don't know. He had troubles enough without them adding any to make a whole regiment miserable. All he had left was his trust in God Almighty. He didn't have a solitary thing else. But these biggoty city dudes kept on trying to get him to give that up. They said he'd be a lot happier without anything at all. Job looked them over and said, *'No doubt ye are the people and wisdom will die with you.'*

"Now one of the signs of sense is to know when you've had your comeuppance and shut up. If these fellows hadn't had theirs I never read of anybody who had. But it made them more talkative than ever. Sometime that's the way with folks. I remember when I had been in college for nine months. I came home full of learning. I was spouting wisdom in the village where men were sitting around as they will on Saturday after dinner. I was giving them deep philosophy and total understanding in full measure when all at once Mr. Tom Gray, the blacksmith, who had been looking straight at me for ten minutes, said, 'Marcus, ain't you been off somewheres?' The others didn't laugh out real loud, but they just about did, and I had enough sense to know I had my comeuppance aplenty. But I was smarter than the fellows that were arguing with Job. I shut up. They just kept going on and on until God Almighty took them in hand. And that's what God Almighty'll do every time."

All this time the preacher's wife and the driver had been seeing something that aroused considerable disquiet within them. A hungry horsefly had lighted on the calf of the preacher's leg and was prospecting for blood. Mrs. Dewitt saw the fly light. She knew what it was doing. She tingled to go to the rescue, but she knew that wouldn't do. She knew her husband and she knew something about soldiers. It would not do for a wife to try to rescue her tall soldierly husband from the ravages of a horsefly while he was in the midst of a sermon. She sat and watched the fly as if hypnotized and she heard not one single word the preacher was saying.

The driver sat even nearer the preacher, a little behind him

and to the right. He too had seen the fly light. He had an alert eye for horseflies. He held an ancient grudge against horseflies. His code rendered distance a horsefly's best security. He stared transfixed at the gorging horsefly, and, in his helplessness, squirmed about all over his seat.

Chaplain Dewitt waxed fervid in his sermon. If a man wouldn't learn lessons from his fellow, God eventually would undertake the role of instructor. But man shouldn't put God to all that trouble. He should accept gladly instruction, even reproof, from his neighbor. Or from whomever or whatever it might be offered. The little things of nature could impart wisdom and humility if one truly wished to find it. Solomon learned greatly from the ant . . .

Chaplain Dewitt felt a sudden, sharp and agonizing pain in the lower reaches of his left leg. His hand was momentarily deflected from a lavish gesture and started on its way to explore the trouble. But that wouldn't do. He withdrew his darting hand almost before it started. There must be no blemish in the dignity of his sermon. So his hand returned to complete the gesture, and the grimace on his face shifted to a rapt look. Whatever it was he could attend to it later, but now let nothing mar the continuity of his message.

Then the pain struck him again. It came to him that it must be one of the ants, which had so challenged Solomon's admiration, that was causing him this trouble. A little later when less in public view he'd search the creature out and joyfully mash it into a pulp. But now let no shadow darken the sermon's decorum.

Again it was as if a hot needle were probing his leg. The distraction threatened his coherence. His thoughts were falling apart. Something would have to be done. Then the idea struck him. A vigorous stamping executed by his left foot would dislodge the ant and at the same time give an increment of power to his words: "Those who will not learn from nature or man or God He will stamp under His feet."

His left foot rose and fell to illustrate the melancholy finish of those so hostile to learning.

His wife and the driver understood his gesture, and they saw that it had failed. The horsefly was still there, stubbornly feasting. Mrs. Dewitt closed her eyes in despair, but she opened them promptly since closed they saw the horsefly greatly enlarged in size and malignancy. The driver saw the tail of the horsefly rise away from its position until it was halfway standing on its head. This was to give it greater leverage to bore all the more deeply.

The driver could stand it no longer. His whip sang through the bright September air. There was a sharp crack and a horsefly that never again would trouble a preacher tumbled to the ground. And at that precise split second the driver knew the grievous thing he had done. He had struck the chaplain of the Eighth Tennessee with his whip while that gentleman was preaching a sermon. The offense had been wholly mechanical, but who would know that? And who would know the events that led to it? And who would forgive it? He could see that the men of the Eighth were staring at him, and that the look on their faces was one of astonishment, overcast with a hint of threat. If anyone tried to make merry with their beloved chaplain . . .

The preacher was quick of perception. He looked around. His alert eyes caught the dying struggles of the horsefly. It was then not one of Solomon's ants. His wife was standing and her pose and look were not of anger but of relief. The driver stood before him in the manner of one with a broken and contrite heart. There flashed across his mind a panorama of death among the horseflies on that buckboard ride more than a year before. The driver's procedure had been apart from thought then. It had been today. No harm done, no offense rendered. The preacher waved the men into silence and attention.

"Brethren, maybe I was getting to be a little vainglorious in my power of speech. Maybe God Almighty sent a horsefly to teach me humility and a wagon driver to protect me. Mysterious are the ways of the Lord. Amen. We will now sing." He looked at the driver who, out of his great relief, was in the spirit of song.

"Oh, Father, will you meet me
On Canaan's happy shore?"

His voice rang out clear and true and touched with a little hill quaver:

"Oh, Brother, will you meet me?
Oh, Brother, will you meet me?
Oh, Brother, will you meet me
On Canaan's happy shore?"

The Eighth Tennessee was singing; Brother Dewitt was singing; Sister Dewitt was singing, and her clear treble added freshness to the heavier voices. The preacher let his eyes wander discreetly, inquiringly to the extreme left. Yes, Charley the Minstrel was singing. This was no cry to Charley's dead sweetheart. It was a call to religious worship, but it too was the promise of a reunion in the hereafter.

"By the grace of God I'll meet you
On Canaan's happy shore."

Above all sounded the voice of the driver. In the midst of preaching but with no touch of desecration he had slain a horse-fly. And those who witnessed it had been led to understand. The driver was in the spirit.

Chaplain Dewitt pronounced the benediction, and he and his wife went down to the creekside and sat on a jutting rock and talked of peace and happy days to come, of life again at Fayetteville.

Then came the call of the mess sergeant. The dinner rations were ready and the Eighth Tennessee would not accept food until their preacher and his pretty young wife were served first. Then all sat eating.

The driver heard it first—the sound of a galloping horse ridden furiously from the south. There was nothing strange in

the sound of a galloping horse to the Army of Tennessee, but this one broke the hush of a Sabbath noon, and the noise of it seemed magnified. The messenger came in view around a bend of the creek. He reined his tired horse at the side of Colonel Anderson, the regiment's commander.

"Where's General Smith, where's General Marcus B. Smith?" he called.

"Down the creek a half mile or so." Colonel Anderson pointed to the north. The messenger galloped away.

"He's from General Cheatham's headquarters," said Colonel Anderson. "My guess is we just as well get ready to move. Anyhow, we've had one square meal."

"Another horsefly's stung Old Bragg, and they wasn't no wagon driver standin' by to kill it," commented a private. "Which way you reckon we'll travel this time?"

The other soldier pondered, then decided: "I'll lay you four bits it's north."

"That's the way we been goin'. We don't never go twicet in the same direction."

"The way I understand it the Yanks can't make up their minds. A houn'-dog chasin' a rabbit has to go the way the rabbit goes. It can't say to the rabbit, 'Looka here, rabbit, you run straight ahaid or I won't chase you.'"

"The way I see it we been the rabbit part o' the time. We was when we left Chattanooga."

"Anyhow, I wish somebody'd make up his mind about sumpin. I'm a-gettin' plumb wore down on account of nobody knows what the answer is."

Colonel Anderson's guess was right. At three o'clock the Eighth Tennessee moved away, slanting toward the east. Other regiments, other brigades, other divisions, other armies were marching too. They didn't know where, but they were marching. They marched when and where they were told to. Heavy clouds of dust dulled the brightness of the September sun.

The chaplain said to his wife, "I'll take you to Sister Napier's. She really is a nice woman, and she'll be glad to have you. I'll

come over to see you every chance I have. I don't think we're going very far, but I don't know."

"Is there about to be a battle?" Her voice was not much above a whisper.

"In a war there's always about to be a battle," he answered soberly. "That is what war is for. I don't see how we'll escape one this time."

There was pain in her eyes. "What good will a battle do?"

"Honey, I just don't know what good. It's in the hands of God Almighty."

8

"I've never been as much in the dark since I joined the army as I am right now," complained General Bedford Forrest to John Morton, the commander of his artillery. "You've heard me say that before, but it's the way I feel."

"What is General Bragg trying to do, General Forrest?"

"I plain don't know, but at that I guess I'll find out before Bragg does. Lord, how we need a good rain! I hate to see crops and horses suffer."

"I feel that way about people," said Morton dryly.

"People can help themselves, but a cornstalk has to stay where it is and a horse has to depend on some man. As for me, I can climb a fence and hunt up water. A horse can't."

"If we're going to fight it out with the Yanks, I'm for doing it right away. I've noticed that soldiers get stale when you put a thing off too long."

"We've already been playing blindman's buff too long all around over North Georgia and it's downright funny to me we haven't bumped into Rosecrans before now. He dodges good or we would have. We're going to bump before long and that's when the ruckus'll start."

"We've got nothing to gain putting it off."

"Gain? We've got everything to lose," Forrest said. "If I'da been in Braxton Bragg's place—— Well, I wasn't." He kicked



a pebble viciously but smiled ruefully. Then he picked up a stick and broke it with a sharp snap. "The Yankees always was lucky. I wish I could get word from Chattanooga."

"You've got somebody there, I reckon, General."

"Several somebodies, John. I tell you I don't like to be left in the dark. But that's where I am. I can't get even a whisper from Chattanooga."

"I've been missing Crockett and Nichol."

"That's where Crockett is. The sergeant too, and I hope Nichol is there. He's due to be there, and if nothing happened I guess he is. I know that things are being hatched in Chattanooga, and I'm depending on them to find out."

"They will if anybody can."

"And one other thing: Nichol's girl is there now too. There wasn't much left for her to do in Nashville, so I made arrangements for her to go there. I haven't told Nichol yet. I don't want him to slight his work any, but I guess he'll find out about her. And a little later I hope he does. But not now. I want him to keep his mind on what I sent him for. They say she's mighty purty."

"I've heard about her. The chief driver of Frank Cheatham's army told me. He got mixed up with Nichol while he was in Nashville last year."

"Seems Nichol run across her while he was spyin' in Nashville last July a year. She's been a lot of help to our people. She can disguise a rip-roaring Rebel so he looks like General Grant. But it got too dangerous for her in Nashville. We figured she was worse needed down here."

"Don't you reckon Nichol will run across her in town?"

"I keep wonderin' whether I ought to get word to him that she's there—that is, if he's there. It might get him so bum-fuzzled that he wouldn't be no more use to us. I don't want that to happen. But in a way I owe it to him. I got so I don't know what to do any longer."

General Frank Cheatham galloped up and said that word had just come that Thomas was moving out of the gap and toward

Chattanooga. Forrest's profanity overflowed again. He said that anybody with the sense of a mud turtle would have know that sooner or later Thomas would decide not to commit suicide after all, and crawl out of the hole he was in. Of course it would have been suicide if Bragg had attacked him in the cove. But, of course, General Bragg wouldn't do anything like that till it's too late, and Thomas just couldn't wait on him any longer. He'd certainly done his part waiting.

"General Bragg will have to act now," said Cheatham.

"Get your guns ready to travel, John. I reckon we'll be going now. Maybe I was wrong about the war being dismissed. I guess we just been having recess."

9

The new day promised no break in the intolerable heat. The sun had a brassy look by the time it had lifted itself above the rim of Missionary Ridge. The day was as still as death itself. The air stirred not, as if to husband with utmost care all of the sun's prodigal yield of heat. Chickens huddled in the shade. Silent, drooping, dejected, the birds sought the thickest leafage they could find.

"I sometimes wonder if it will ever rain again," said Captain Hume Crockett sitting listlessly on the side of the bed in Mrs. Whitesides' house. "Snow, sleet, ice or anything—I'll never again complain of winter."

"'O ye of little faith,'" quoted Lieutenant Beasley Nichol. "'A hot day only brings closer the inevitable cloud. A clear day leads the way for a rainy one, a drought is prelude to a flood, and the winds are calm to gather power for the gale.'"

"It's his mind," explained the captain very patiently to Sergeant Goforth. "It acts that way sometimes. I've been worried about it for some time."

"I was skeered it was mine. What he said didn't make no sense to me."

"I'm hot," said Crockett, "I'm tired, I'm dirty and I'm lone-

some. I haven't heard a word from my girl in three months, nor from my mother in fourteen weeks, and I don't see that that means I'm certain to get a letter today."

"My mind thinks ahead. My lovely thoughts were not uttered for immediate use. I haven't had a word from my girl since June."

"I got a notion my girl can't write," said the sergeant, "though she used to could a little."

"I'm afraid mine's left Nashville," said Nichol. "The last time I heard she thought the time might come when there wouldn't be any use in her staying on longer. The Yankees had been getting tighter and tighter. I'm bothered, too, a lot bothered. What's that? Listen!"

It was the Prophet. He was coming down the street along the route of his march the day before. The rumbling blur presently divided itself into intelligible words: "War on the mountain, war in the valley, war on the rivers, guns a-shootin' everywhere, and men a-fallin' down on the ground and a-dyin' and a-goin' to their Maker unprepared. Cannon is a-roarin' in people's ears and blood a-spillin' before people's eyes; and widders and orphans a-multiplyin' like the grains of sand on the Tennessee River bank. Listen to the Scriptures. *Is my hand shortened? Have I no power to deliver? I will surely deliver.*"

The Prophet took four or five steps in silence. Then his hoarse voice sounded again. "*They chose new gods; then was war in the gates.*"

The voice of the Prophet sank in the distance. Crockett stood, his brow puckered in thought.

"What was it he said about *delivered? Delivered?* He must have been telling us that he had delivered our message to General Forrest. Don't you suppose that was it?"

"Must be," said Goforth. "He gives me the creeps."

Mrs. Whitesides knocked on the door and came into the room. "The Prophet's making a bigger racket out there than ever. You all hear him?"

Crockett looked steadily at her for a long time. "We heard him."

"You all leaving today?"

"I don't think so. It's a long trip back. We need another day's rest, maybe two."

"Yes, I think you would. Going to be lots o' excitement before long."

"We're going to headquarters for our passes today."

She stood, hands on hips, and looked at him steadily. There was the vague hint of a smile on her face. "Of course, if one of you happens to get sick the others would wait a day or two for him to get well."

There was almost a smile on Crockett's face. "Which one of us looks sickly to you?"

She pointed unerringly to Nichol. "He does." Then she said, "I heard some talk last night."

"What kind of talk?"

"From what I heard, there was a Yankee walking along over on Walden's Ridge and a Southern man hit him in the head with a pistol and stole his shoes."

"His shoes? You don't mean stole his shoes."

"That's what I heard. And this Yankee got to town last night. I heard he was feeling as mean-natured as a catamount. I'd sort o' hate to be that Southern man."

"Maybe the Southern man ought to disguise himself," said Crockett. "I would if I were in his place. I wouldn't want that Yankee to know me."

"Isn't it funny but I know where there's a woman that's first-rate in disguising people. She hasn't been here long but from what I hear she could take General Lee and make him look just like Abe Lincoln."

Beasley Nichol stood so hastily that both chair and floor creaked. "The time may come, indeed it may, dear lady, when I'll need a disguise. Perhaps one would add not only to my safety but to my comeliness. When I start back to rejoin General Grant, for instance. Part of the way will lead through Rebel territory. Tell me about this paragon whose magic touch can so transform man's exterior for better or worse. Where could I find her?"

"If I was the Reb that stole the Yankee's shoes on Walden's Ridge I'd be looking for her."

Nichol looked long at Mrs. Whitesides and his eyes widened. Then with dramatic flourish he raised his eyes to the ceiling. "Heart, be still until I do ask this lady the questions that surge within me."

"You mean about this soldier that got his shoes stole?" Mrs. Whitesides' face was stolid and her jaws hung slackly, but a quizzical light smoldered deep in her eyes.

"Yes, of course, I mean him, and this man who took his shoes should indeed be most careful. And no doubt he will. Indeed, he must. But this lady who disguises people; oh, do tell me where she is! It could be that I once saw her; that I once spoke to her; and that I heard her voice speak in reply. Oh, it could be——"

"It might be the same. The way you talk it sounds like her. Isn't it a shame you have to go back to General Grant right away?"

"Can I go back to him when my heart is here? Where is she?"

"I don't rightly know. I did but she isn't there now. She left that place. You want a disguise?"

"My life depends on it."

"I got that notion, too; and I got another notion that right now's a mighty good time for you to take real sick and stay indoors."

"Stay indoors? Take sick, now that my life——?"

"That's it exactly. This Yankee that got knocked in the head, he's a-sayin' to the generals there's a spy in town and he's going to find him, and if you was out on the street somewheres he might make a mistake and think you took his shoes. You can't ever tell what a man who's been hit on the head is liable to think."

"It's not like you to be sick, Nichol," said Crockett unsmiling. "Must be something you ate. We'll not start back to General Grant till you are feeling better."

"I'll find out what I can about this disguising woman," said

Mrs. Whitesides. "I expect you're going to be needing her all right."

"We won't go to headquarters for our passes today," said Crockett. "There were three of us last night, and if only two appeared somebody might become curious. We'll walk about some though and see what we can."

"The Prophet'll do some preachin' if anything special comes up. You just listen. I'll find out about this disguising woman sometime today."

"And let me know the minute you find out?" asked Nichol.

"That's what I'll find out for."

"Find out what you can about the Yankee from Walden's Ridge," said Crockett. "I'd like to know about him."

"The way I heard it he's set a whole pack o' Yankee policemen lookin' for the man that hit him. They are folks will tell me if anything special happens."

"Will they tell you where this girl is?" implored Nichol.

"Even if you knew for certain where she is you couldn't go see her now. That'd be mighty dangerous for you, and for her, and for—other folks."

"How leaden will pass the hours!" said Nichol. "Did I say *hours*? Seconds!"

Mrs. Whitesides left the room. Nichol paced back and forth the length of the room. "I knew. Something told me that she was no longer in Nashville. But idiot that I am, I never once thought of her being here, never once thought that she walked on the streets of Chattanooga, that she lived in a house here, that she talked with people here. Never once! Good heavens, there's that Yankee! My college friend from Walden's Ridge."

He dodged back from the open space before the window. "You look," he said to Crockett. "He's the taller one."

But Crockett was cautious and peeped from the corner of the window. Two Union officers stood in the street. They were talking and there was a manifest air of intentness about the words they spoke. One of them, the taller, searched the street with restless eyes, the near-by houses, the yards. After a little while the two moved on.

"They've gone."

"See if they are looking back," said Nichol.

"No, they've gone on up the street. It looks like they are not interested in us. I guess he's forgot all about the mountain. The Yankees don't harbor grudges."

"Let's you and me get out o' here." The sergeant spoke to Crockett. "This stayin' indoors is makin' me nervous. I need out-o'-doors."

"I think I'd like a stroll, too," agreed Crockett. "There might be a chance to see what the Yanks are doing. Maybe I'm a trifle nervous, too."

"Mebbe we can run on sumpin to send word to Ginral Forrest about."

"You keep in mind that you're sick." Crockett nodded to Nichol. "You're not going to die, at least not right away, but you're too sick to start on a trip. We can't start back to General Grant with you like this. That's our story if anybody asks. You'll be better as soon as this Yankee from Walden's Ridge quiets down, or you can get a disguise. It might be that we'll have to start on without you."

"I don't want any doctor coming up here. Don't let them think I'm that sick."

10

Crockett and Goforth went out on the street and turned toward town. The street was hot. Heat seemed to rise from the bricks of the sidewalks, from the cobblestones of the street, from the iron fences around the yard. The tiles of the rooftops were beds of heat whose waves shimmered angrily in the bright sunlight. Heat beat down unmercifully on all forms of life. There was not the shred of a cloud visible in the sky.

As they passed the Catholic Church on Lindsay Street, an officer, riding swiftly, brought his horse to a quick stop directly in front of the church, flung himself from his horse, threw the

reins of his bridle over an iron paling and walked quickly through the open door.

"Did you see who that was, Sergeant?"

"I seen him."

"So General Rosecrans is still in town. I thought he was going to the front last night."

"He said he was. I reckon he come back. Mebbe he missed a paper or sumpin'."

An orderly rode up and drew his horse to a stop beside the general's.

"General Rosecrans outride you?" asked Crockett pleasantly.

"He sent me back to headquarters for some stuff." He patted fat saddlebags.

"Must be an important trip."

"Of course it's important. That's the only kind o' trip the general goes on. Hope he doesn't pray too long. We've got a lot of riding ahead of us, and it sure is hot."

"The general goes to church pretty regular, doesn't he? I've heard he does."

"Always does before something important. I hope his prayers are answered this time. What they are about is plenty important."

"Wish you luck," said Crockett, and he and Goforth walked on up the street. They turned a corner. Below them was the railroad station and across the street from it the Crutchfield House. Soldiers were crowded in the area about the two buildings.

Crockett faced Goforth. "Sergeant, how about you taking a trip to General Forrest?"

"I thought that's what you would be wantin'. I reckon I could get there."

"You've got your pass, the pass General Grant gave us. Maybe you can use it. Of course you know you stand a chance of running into trouble. You'll have to get out the best way you can. You've wiggled out of trouble before."

"What you want me to tell Bed?"

"Maybe he already knows the Yankees are about to break loose, but you tell him what you just heard: that General Rosecrans always prays before something important is about to happen. Tell Bed the general is praying now."

"I can start right now, Captain. I'll make it somehow. When I find Bed and tell him, what you want me to do then?"

"Whatever General Forrest tells you to do. The main thing is to get there and as soon as you can."

"My guess is Bed's somewheres about Ringgold. But I'll find him, wherever he is."

"Watch out when you get close to our lines. That uniform might get you shot."

"I'll watch. You take care o' the lieutenant."

"Just like he's a baby. Good luck!"

11

Sergeant Goforth took a long look to the south toward Ross-ville, toward Lafayette, then moved his eyes a trifle to the south-east toward Ringgold. He cast a speculative glance to the sun, measuring its height. He turned and walked rapidly away. Crockett stood on the hot street watching him. They had soldiered together almost since the war began. He knew the sergeant's solid quality. The Yankee would be alert who prevented Goforth from reaching General Forrest. Bugles sounded from the mass of soldiers in front of the Crutchfield House, and order grew in the movements of the soldiers. They began to form in squads and companies.

Crockett returned to Mrs. Whitesides'. The hot room was empty. Nichol was not there. He called Mrs. Whitesides. She came to the room but knew nothing of the lieutenant. She had heard no one come in and no one leave, and she had been in the house all of the time. The room was in exactly the same order that Crockett and Goforth had left it. There was about it no hint of Nichol's departure. Crockett shrugged his shoulders and sat down. His companion was entirely predictable in an emergency; quite otherwise in casual matters. Perhaps this came un-

der the head of casual things. Crockett had a different notion. It wasn't casual to him. But again he shrugged his shoulders. Nichol would be back soon.

12

The room's only window offered protection against the sun which blazed slantingly into it from two o'clock until it sank from sight.

Beasley Nichol watched his companions leave before he brought his vision back to the little room. There was a worn copy of *The Spy* on the rickety table. He saw the book, grimaced wryly, picked it up and started reading it. The weather was too hot to read in any comfort. After a half-dozen pages he closed the book, placed it back on the table and sat staring out at the baked and deserted street. He shifted the chair into the shaded portion of the room. It seemed to him that there was no air to breathe there. He tried the bed only to find it hot to the touch. He got up from the bed and lay on the floor. It was not hot and he dozed fitfully for a few minutes.

He awoke to find that his head was throbbing with pain. He arose and again sat by the window, not in front of it, but hidden as much as he could and still breathe air from the outside which was fresh notwithstanding its almost unbearable heat. There was little movement on the street, but he could hear the sounds, muted by distance of considerable activity in the neighborhood of the railroad depot. And while he listened to it he heard the clear notes of a bugle, then some distant shouting. He wished that Crockett and Goforth would come back. And yet there was not enough air in the room for all. His head was still aching.

He decided that he couldn't stand the inertia any longer. It would be hot outside but there would be shade somewhere where one could breathe air which, if scorched by the sun, would not be poisoned by the limits of four narrow walls. Why didn't Crockett and Goforth come back? His hand clasped his brow fiercely as if to stifle a fresh and keen throb of pain. Perhaps there was no make-believe in his sickness. Now and then under the trials

of war his head had felt a bit heavy and disturbed but nothing like this. Always activity had cleared the pain away. Again his hand moved swiftly to his brow. It was sore to the touch. All right, he couldn't stand this any longer. He was going out of that house, out on that street, even if twenty of his Princeton brothers were there.

He arose from his chair and put on his cap, easing it as best he could to his tortured brow. As he opened the door which led into the hall a loud and familiar rattle sounded from the street at the back of the house. It was, he knew, a cannon being drawn over the cobblestone street. He caught an oblique glance of Mrs. Whitesides sitting at a rear window which yielded an unobstructed view of the passage of the cannon. It was his first thought to tell her that he was taking a brief and discreet turn outside to clear a distressed head. But she would object and he would likely be back before she missed him. Besides she was engrossed in the progress of the cannon. He would not bother her. So he walked quietly through the door and out to the street. Oddly, his head felt better.

There was no one in sight on the street. He turned to the right and walked toward Lookout Mountain which stood clear and stark ahead of him. His head was no longer aching but a few minutes alone in the hot room would start it again. He didn't think Crockett and Goforth would return for a while yet. He would get back before they did.

He walked on up the little rise, turned to the east. Still the street was practically deserted. A Negro walked slouchingly and aimlessly down the street on the opposite side. Nichol was passing a yard in which a bed of zinnia flowers had burned to a crisp. He saw a church a block ahead. He decided to walk to it and back again. His two comrades might be coming back by that time. He wondered if they would have learned anything. But what was there to learn? Almost all the enemy's soldiers had moved on southward. He knew that fortifications were in progress along the town's southern and eastern outposts; also that in Chattanooga the plans of the Yankees would be brought into focus. This was why General Forrest had sent them here.

Again labored rumbling sounded on the back street. More

cannon were passing, cannon that doubtless were being added to the strength of the enemy out beyond the city's southern borders. He reached the church. The door was open. Within its cavernous and shaded interior would be surcease from the torrid heat outside. He went and stood just within the door.

Presently his vision fitted itself to the gloom. No one else was in the church. The coolness was a balm. He sank into a pew at the rear of the room and sat enveloped in delicious relief. His head was clear of pain. He thought that he'd get back to General Forrest the next day. At least he'd try. Captain Whitaker's presence in Chattanooga made him impotent in General Forrest's service. Moreover, it put him in deadly peril. No day of his life for two full years had been without danger, but rarely had the menace been so close, so insistent.

Suddenly the sense of Hunter Cragwall's nearness gripped him. He had felt it while Mrs. Whitesides was talking, but then only at the outer rim of his mind. Now he was certain. She was somewhere in Chattanooga at that moment. In a hot room she was disguising someone and so continuing the aid to the South she had long been giving.

He remembered the day she had recast his features and re-wrought his very expression by coloring. It had been in the rear of a cobbler's shop on Cherry Street in Nashville. It had been hot that day, too, and later it had rained. He remembered every detail—the beard, the stain distilled from the pulpy covering of black walnuts. He remembered her. How lovely she had been! Twice after that he had seen her, each time for a few golden moments. She had told him in a letter that if the Yankees didn't relax their watchfulness she'd have to leave Nashville. She was willing to go wherever she was needed most. They had pledged a prompt meeting in Nashville when the war was finished. Perhaps they would meet again during the war but the chances were growing more and more unlikely. At least he had thought so till today. Now she was here in Chattanooga! This was where she'd do the cause most good. Mrs. Whitesides knew where she was. Memories stirred within him. No, perhaps she didn't know, but she could find out. He would go see Hunter, and no Princeton alumnus would stop him.

A slight sound reached his ears from the church door. He looked around but nothing stirred. The sound, if there had been one, was not repeated. He had been mistaken. Crockett and Goforth would be back soon. He should be at the house when they arrived. It was time for him to be going. He started to rise from the pew. There was a quick distinct footstep behind him. Suddenly an awful tumult raged within his head and consciousness faded as he slumped heavily to the floor.

13

By sundown Crockett stopped being merely annoyed and became uneasy.

Mrs. Whitesides came in. "I'd forgot about it, but there was one time when he coulda gone out o' the house without me noticin'. They were a-hauling cannons on Cypress Avenue and I set at the back window and watched 'em. They made such a racket that I wouldn'ta heard him leave. I guess that's when he went."

"Where'd he go, and why hasn't he come back?"

"You remember my talkin' with him about some woman that was here in town, a woman it seems he used to know. You don't reckon he's off somewheres a-tryin' to find her? Now that I think of it he seemed mighty interested."

"I don't know where he is, and I'm getting worried about him. It does look like Nichol would have had more sense, things being like they are, than to get out on the street with half the Yankees in Chattanooga looking for him by now."

"Maybe he reckoned it was a mighty good time for him to report to General Forrest."

"He would have left us a note. No, he wouldn't have left at all until he had talked with us. It wouldn't be like him to do that."

"Uh-huh, it looks funny. Where's the other fellow?"

Crockett hesitated, then decided it was better in everything not to try to evade Mrs. Whitesides in anything. "We found out something we thought General Forrest ought to know and the sergeant is on his way to tell him."

"What'd you find out?"

Again Crockett hesitated but not long. "We found out that the Yankees are getting ready for something important, probably a decisive battle."

"I coulda told you that. General Rosecrans is a-prayin' mornin', noon and night in the Catholic Church, and all the big generals are on their horses and a-riding south. I guess the Prophet done sent word to General Forrest."

"The need for us here seems to shrink. I'm troubled about Nichol. I don't know a thing to do, and that troubles me still more. Listen, lady: do you have any idea where he went or why?"

"I told you the truth. He's got no business outside this house, and the only thing to do is put the Prophet on his track."


Crockett stood for a full minute saying nothing, his eyes on the door as if he expected Nichol to walk through it. "Then do it," he said.

14

Beasley Nichol had the notion that he was dead, and that somewhere he was buried very deep. But from back among a dense jungle of sensations the inquiry intruded itself: how if he were dead he could be conscious of it. Consciousness was a state denied those dead. He couldn't answer that one but the idea that he was dead persisted. No one alive could feel so detached. Such remoteness belonged only in death. The unearthly sensations that milled about in the vast emptiness of his head had no part in life.

He thought at first that it was music that he heard, the distant and fused chanting of a heavenly choir. Presently it resolved itself into a single human voice, a voice whose sweetness gave it a clear title to the heavenly hosts. He opened his eyes and saw bending over him Hunter Cragwall.

Then he knew that he was in a room, in a bed, in such a bed as belonged in the long ago. Dimly he was enveloped in a sense of delicious cleanliness. How lovely to be alive even though some of it he could not understand!



"Good morning, Lieutenant Nichol," Hunter Cragwall was saying from the bedside.

Morning! How could it be morning? This was fantastic. Time which had been extending into an infinity of interlude suddenly drew itself together like rubber stretched and released. How could it be morning? Only a short period before he had sat in the pew of a church and then it was only a little after mid-afternoon. What had become of the night? He wished to speak but somehow the words wouldn't form.

"But, now that you're here, I think you'll be needing a disguise, won't you? I'm prepared, Lieutenant Nichol, to disguise you very effectively."

Then the words formed and poured out:

*"Or I am mad? or else this is a dream:—
Let fancy still my sense in Lethe steep;
If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep!"*

Tell me, my love, am I awake, and are you here in this room? And if I held out my hand would I touch you?"

. She was smiling. "Try it," she said, "and find out for yourself."

He did. He took her by the arm and pulled her down toward him. Then his hand went around her shoulder, and his lips were against hers. There was no war being waged about them, none of the dreadful sounds of conflict, no cannon rattling over the cobblestones, nothing that hinted of violence, of death and separation and desolation. In the quiet room life and love turned away all of man's uglier aspect.

She released herself and stood looking at him. "Yes, I think I'll have to disguise you," she said tenderly.

"Is it necessary?"

"It was long ago while disguising you that I found my first sweetheart."

"And last?"

"The first and the last."

"Where am I? Tell me what blessed miracle it was that brought me here."

"It was a man, a very dear man who brought you. Tell me what was it that happened to you?"

"In the church?"

"Yes, in the church. That's where you were found. What were you doing there?"

"I was hot and tired and I went in to rest."

"Then what?"

"I don't know. I stayed awhile and started to leave. The next thing I knew you spoke to me. I've no idea what happened. Well, not much of an idea."

"What became of your shoes?"

"Shoes? Shoes?"

"Yours were gone."

"Gone where?"

"All I know is that you were lying barefoot on the floor of the church."

"Barefoot?" He felt gingerly of his head. "That gives me an idea, a very, very big idea. So, he took my shoes! Why, the fellow positively has a feeling for the dramatic. I could like him. I really could."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about my shoes, dear, and the man who struck me on the head and took them away from me. It's as good as a play. It's better than most plays."

"The man who brought you found this pinned to your blouse." She handed him a note.

Beasley Nichol had no doubt about the contents of the note before he started to unfold it.

You could have killed me but you didn't. This squares matters. I got down that mountain all right. Get out of Chattanooga if you can. I'll give you till midnight.

"Let me see it," said Hunter Cragwall.

He handed it to her. "It belongs to the past, my dear. The present is ours."

She read the note. "How odd!" she said. "You must tell me

about it sometime. It sounds as though it might belong in the future."

His voice answering was gay. "The future? Nothing like that belongs in our future."

"How long have you been in Chattanooga? How did you get here?"

"Why am I in bed?" He sat up suddenly, then lay quickly back, overcome by dizziness.

"You shouldn't have done that," she said. "You're in bed because you've been struck hard on the head with a hard object, perhaps the handle of a pistol. The man who brought you here said you should stay in bed two days. I should see to it that you didn't get up sooner."

"Who brought me here?"

"We call him the Prophet."

"Oh! So it was the Prophet! What an odd world this is! How could he know where I was?"

"He didn't tell me, but anything he doesn't know he can find out."

"I've seen him twice."

"Oh, you have! How'd you like his disguise?"

"Did he have a disguise?"

"I made it. You'd be surprised to see what he looks like without my handiwork. Where did you see him?"

"He passed the house where I was staying."

"Preaching?"

"I guess you'd call it that. It sounded like it. Maybe he had another purpose in mind. Tell me, my love, how did you get here?"

"It was mainly General Forrest's idea. I'll tell you the whole story when we have a little more time to live in the past."

"The Prophet seems an extraordinary fellow."

"He has been very helpful, but someday the Yankees will begin to think about him—and about me."

"Dear, go home; go back to Nashville and wait there. Go back. I'll come."

"What could I do at home now?"

"You'd be *safe* there."

"That's all, and I'm not at all sure I'd be that. Anyhow, I'd be wretched just being safe and watching Nashville slowly decay. That's what is happening. You don't want to be safe and I don't either. I want to help. Tell me about the man who left you the note."

He told her what had occurred on the mountainside, of his coming into Nashville and of the events since. She listened, never taking her eyes from his face. Her hand clasped his as it lay on the sheet, clasped it and held it tight. "In all of that did you ever think of me?"

"You never thought of me when I wasn't thinking of you," he said with gay challenge.

"I knew I'd see you again, sometime, somewhere. How could I know it and not see you?"

"You couldn't, and would I be blind while you were seeing me? Would my eyes not see too?"

"How will it all end?" she asked.

"Happily. Right now I haven't any doubt it will. Peace will come and then I shall never leave you again. Tell me about you."

"There isn't much to tell. I disguise our soldiers who need to get through the Yankee lines. Lately I've had plenty of work to do."

"Mrs. Whitesides said you had moved."

"I've been here only two days. I got uneasy where I was before. The people there were all right, but some things troubled me."

"Whose house is this? Who lives here?"

"That's the only thing I can't tell you. I've given my word not to tell anyone so long as I'm here. It's an honorable house and for the time being I'm safe. A home that is not under suspicion—yet. Is there about to be a battle?"

"Crockett thought so. . . . Crockett? Crockett? . . . That makes me think. I must get him word where I am. I really must. I'd forgotten all about him. I tell you I must. He'll start looking for me and that will be dangerous."

"Don't worry. He knows you are safe."

"How does he?"

"Take my word for it. He knows."

His eyes grew round. "The Prophet?"

She said nothing but sat looking at him tenderly. The sun came into the room and touched her hair making it a heavy gold. If there was anyone else in the house, no sound told. They sat and talked and she gripped the hand that lay on the sheet. It was hot as from fever and his eyes at times were uncertain but his smile was warm and bright.

"After a while you'll be wanting some breakfast, but the Prophet said you were to be given no food for three hours after you came back to consciousness."

"The Prophet? Who is he anyway?"

"A remarkable man, a helpful man to the South, and one I'll remember with gratitude as long as I live. He brought you to me. I disguised him first back in Nashville."

"How'd he happen to find me?"

"It was no happen, my dear. I don't know just what went on but I'm sure someone got the word to him that you were missing."

"That was Crockett. Yes, Crockett and Mrs. Whitesides. But the church—why'd he look for me there?"

"He had good reasons, I fancy. He usually has. He found you sometime before midnight and carried you here. The streets were deserted except for the patrols. When they got too near him he turned into near-by yards until they'd passed."

"He carried me, you say? I'm no feather."

"The man is a veritable Samson. He came into the door with you over his shoulder like a bag of corn. I think you might have your breakfast now. Aren't you starved?"

"Would you talk to me of vulgar food when my spirit has been feasting?"

Then a mockingbird in an elm tree outside the window with suddenness and without reason broke into a song of pure ecstasy. Nichol lay listening to it and as he did his eyes grew steadier and brighter. "Why," he said, "it's my old feathered friend

from the mountain. How exquisite! Its singing is the token of heaven's continued favor."

"Oh," she said smiling, "if that's the bird you're talking about it has been waiting for you for two days and singing most of the time."

"That was for you. Now it's singing for us." His face grimaced from a sudden throb of pain, and his hand moved quickly to his forehead as if to thrust the ache aside.

"Oh," she said in distress, "forgive me! You should have been resting."

"But, my love, one can't properly enjoy heaven simply by resting."

"If you don't rest now you might really get there soon. Two hours from now I'll come back and bring some breakfast."

"Don't go!" he begged. "I don't need sleep and I don't need food. All I need is the sight of you, the clasp of your hand, the sound of your voice——"

But she went quietly through the door and gently closed it. A few minutes later he was sleeping, while she in a large bare room not far away altered the looks of a soldier to make more safe and easy his escape through enemy lines.

15

Mrs. Whitesides and Hume Crockett sat in Crockett's room waiting.

"If anyone could find him the Prophet would. If anything has happened to your friend he would find it out and let me know."

"Nichol wasn't taken out of here. He left of his own free will, but, in heaven's name, why?"

"Maybe he got to thinking about his girl. Men are curious sometimes, and when they get to thinkin' they do funny things. Listen to that."

It was the Prophet making his round. At first they could hear only his rasping shout, but gradually the words lifted themselves out of a confused roar into growing intelligibility.

"He's coming earlier 'n common. I reckon he's got some news for us. This is jest about as early as he could come without getting noticed."

They could hear him clearly now: "War on the mountain, war everywhere; blood a-runnin' like water, cannon a-shootin' men to pieces, homes a-burnin' and crops a-bein' tromped down and uprooted. Turn ye, turn ye, saith the Lord. *Where shall wisdom be found? God has found out the iniquity of thy servant. One among ten thousand have I found. Your children shall not wander in the wilderness.*"

Mrs. Whitesides arose, reassurance on her face. "He's all right. That's what the Prophet was sayin'. He's all right. He found him."

The Prophet's voice was not fading. Obviously he had slowed down to a mere shuffle. "*Flee from the wrath to come. Flee to the mountain. From one city flee to another.*"

"Listen," said Mrs. Whitesides: "he's telling us to get out. Well, I been expecting it. I got a brother in North Carolina. I'll flee to him. I'm prepared to flee. I like you, Captain, and I'm a-tellin' you that if I was you I wouldn't stay around here longer 'n I could help. The Prophet knows what he's saying. It isn't safe here any more."

She paused a moment. The Prophet's cry had faded to a whisper. "I reckon there are others he'll be a-warnin'. Things must be getting mighty bad."

"I don't know where I'll go but I'm not leaving Chattanooga. Nichol is still here somewhere and I can't leave him. Besides, General Forrest wants me here. If he didn't he would have let me know."

"The lieutenant's all right. That's what the Prophet was saying. The house is a-breaking up. This time tomorrow won't find anybody in it. I reckon it's one time we just naturally got to humor the Yankees. It's time to be movin'."

Hunter Cragwall found Beasley Nichol out of bed and sitting in a chair when she carried a tray of food to his room. "It's no

time for you to run any risk," she said reprovingly. "You should have stayed in bed."

"It's no time for able-bodied strong-souled, patriotic men like me to stay in bed."

"All right. You can prove it by eating every bite of this. How does your head feel?"

"Just like my heart."

"Indeed? How is that?"

"In love, now and forever."

"I'm afraid your head isn't any better."

"Oh," he said eying the platter, "stewed chicken and, bless my eyes, if that isn't boiled onions! They belong in the long ago. I'd all but forgotten."

"There are no other vegetables except potatoes. It's been so dry."

She watched him while he ate and his eyes rested on her more than on the food which he was eating with relish.

"I'd like to talk about us," she said never taking her eyes off him. "We have a chance to talk now. When will we have one again?"

"All right, I'd like to talk about us, too. There's a question I'd like to ask."

"Yes, what question?"

"Will you marry me?"

"Why, I thought . . . I thought . . ."

"Yes, I think so, too; but nothing is legal till the question has been asked and answered. Will you?"

"You know I will. You've known it from the first time I ever saw you. But I'm glad you asked me. It is possible—oh, yes it is—that this is the last time . . . that I'll never see you again."

"Don't talk like that!"

"If I never see you again I'll remember this hour, this minute as the most precious time of my life. What will you do when the war is over? You can't be a soldier always."

"I want to be an actor once more. If Edwin Forrest wants me

I'll go back with him. I can do nothing else so well. But you, sweetheart, will speak first and Edwin Forrest second. I'll never return to the stage if you wish otherwise."

"I'll not be the wife to tell you not to do the thing you love most and can do best. I'll not be that kind of wife. Maybe you can take me along to make you up for the roles you play——" She broke off in a little laugh. "We talk of things so far away, so blessed, but so far away."

"You're not far away."

"No, but I fear Edwin Forrest is. Do you know, my dear, that you have no shoes and that I wouldn't know how to find a pair for you, they're so scarce. And, my dear one, you can't stay here much longer. Too much danger. It's time for you to leave."

"I can't leave barefoot," he said looking ruefully down at his feet. "Would it be too risky for us to sit at the window? I want to look outside. I want to sit with you and hold your hand and see a world that used to be so lovely, that some dear day will be lovely again."

She looked at him soberly. "I heard awhile ago that the Yankees are having some doubts about your Mrs. Whitesides. She has been warned to leave Chattanooga. She may not be here even now."

"Then what will Crockett do?"

"I don't know. You've told me that he's resourceful. He'll manage."

"I must see him."

"Be careful! Watch that window! Don't get where anyone could see you too plainly. Better move over a little. Remember, I haven't disguised you yet."

"I guess you'd better do it right away. My Princeton brother seems an alert soldier."

A grinding of wheels on the stones outside; the slow, uncertain click of a horse's hoofs. Out on the street Nichol saw a rattletrap spring wagon drawn by a gaunt, depressed horse. On the seat rode two ragged, tousled boys in their early teens. In the wagon bed was a stone crock. The wagon was passing the house. A boyish treble was lifted shrilly on the somnolent air. "Bee-

tree honey! Fresh bee-tree honey! Come and git your fresh bee-tree honey! You never tasted sweeter honey 'n this. Come and git hit!"

Nichol's eyes moved quickly to the boys' feet. They were clad in trim and sturdy boots. "Great heavens, get that boy in here, the larger one. I must see him. No, I'm not crazy, not at all. I tell you I've got to see that boy."

"Why do you—?"

"I haven't time to tell you now. Later. Bring him in here. Please!"

She looked at him, puzzled. "Please!" he repeated. "I need to see him. No harm will come of it. Bring both of them, or just one. Hurry!"

She looked at him again, then went out the door. A minute later she was back with the older youth.

"How much honey you got for sale, son?"

"More 'n a gallon. Hit's mighty good honey. Sweetest honey I ever tasted."

"Indeed. Well, I mustn't let it go where it will be eaten by unappreciative people. I'll take it."

"You mean about a pint or a quart?"

"I mean all of it. I don't do anything by fractions. What's your price, crock and all?"

"All of it? I guess about a dollar."

"Too cheap. I won't give you a cent less than a dollar and a half. See that lady? She's been suffering for years from a lack of pure Walden's Ridge bee-tree honey. This'll make her into a new woman—wait a moment, I don't want a new woman. This'll keep her just like she is. That's the kind of honey to buy." The lad regarded him uncertainly. "What a fine pair of boots! My word, how I'd like to have a pair of boots like that! They'd fit me, too; much too big for you. Will four dollars and a half get honey and boots? Won't hurt you to go barefoot; you're young. Four and a half dollars'll practically make you a rich man."

"How'd you know that honey came from Walden's Ridge?" asked the boy.

"I think you ought to go back to bed," said Hunter Cragwall hurriedly.

"Don't interrupt, my love. Four and a half. What do you say?"

"Hit's a trade. I'll go fetch the honey." He went out the door in a hurry.

"You're not getting your own boots back, are you?"

"You've missed the drama of it, my love. I forgot to tell you one episode on the mountainside. These are the shoes of my Princeton brother. I took them from him. I remember them well—that knotted string, everything. Why, it's better than a play. How fitting——"

The boy came back carrying the crock. "Here's your honey, mister. You want to buy another pair o' shoes, mister? My brudder's got a pair?"

"My poverty restrains me," explained Nichol. "I simply haven't got the money."

"You got two dollahs mo', mister. I seen hit while you was a-countin'."

"Oh, all right. Two pairs of shoes and a crock o' honey. Six dollars and fifty cents."

"I'll go git my brudder's shoes."

"Wait a second. A trade like this makes us friends, and that brings on a handshake."

He held out his hand. The boy didn't take it.

"Ah," said Nichol. "Would the color of my uniform have anything to do with it?"

"Lissen, I ain't a-cheatin' no Yankee but I ain't a-shakin' his hand neither. Ifn I could git them shoes to my brudders you couldn't have 'em a-tall."

"Where are your brothers?"

"They off fightin' wid Ginral Lee. You still want to buy that honey and them shoes?"

"Here's your money, my lad. Might be I'll see your brothers sometime."

"You better not see 'em. They eat Yankees; yes sir, they eat 'em alive."

"Such poor taste in food. Anyhow I'm glad to trade with you, and I'll not tell any Yankee general you have brothers in General Lee's army. I promise you I won't. I hope you won't miss the shoes too much."

"I'd ruther go barefooted." The lad returned to the wagon and presently came back with his brother's shoes. He handed them to Nichol.

The wagon bumped and limped away.

"I didn't want the other pair of shoes," Nichol said a little wearily, "but at the time it seemed the best thing to do. I wish I could deliver them to some boy with General Lee. We'll find a use for them."

"I just thought of something. Excuse me a moment." In a brief while Hunter Cragwall came back and handed Nichol a pair of heavy woolen socks.

"They're a little hot for now, but you wear them. They'll save your feet."

"I'll take care of them. I'll wear them every day, tenderly. I'll even walk on tiptoe, and all the time I'll look at them and remember dear things. Twenty years from now, maybe thirty, I'll sit in the corner by the fire with the love light shining in my eyes and watch you darn them."

16

Chaplain Dewitt of the Eighth Tennessee heard how things were shaping up and rode at a gallop to the Napier home where his wife was quartered.

"I'm sorry, honey," he said. They stood at the stile to which she had run when she saw the tall lanky, gangling form, so beloved by her, dismount from the familiar roan. "I'm sorry but you've got to go back to Fayetteville. Right away." He told her of the menace in the recent movements of the armies.

She looked at him, her eyes sober but steady. "All right. I've stayed as long as I expected to. I hate to leave you, but if there are any late vegetables I ought to try to save them."

"It's too long a trip for a woman to make by herself," he said gloomily. "I'll be terribly worried."

"I'll not be afraid. I'll get home all right."

"You'll run into a lot of Yankees."

"I met several as I came. They were as polite as our soldiers."

"General Cheatham gave me a letter for you to carry with you. It says who you are and where you're going. He has given letters to several ladies before. The Yankees have always honored them and usually been very courteous, but they make the ladies sign a pledge that they've no contraband with them, that they'll carry no messages and render no military aid on the trip. One woman broke her word to them and the Yankees confiscated a lot of her people's property."

"I'll be careful. I've got it all planned out. I'll stay tonight at Brother Mitchell's, tomorrow night at Brother McComas', the next at Brother Moore's, and the next after that I'll be at home, our home."

"God bless you, wife! Your presence here has been a benediction. I mourn to see you go, but the time has come for you to leave. This place may be stained with blood ere many days have passed. You'd best be at home."

"Blood!" She stood staring at him and her face was drained chalk-white.

"Not mine, my love. Something would warn me if this was my time to go and I haven't been warned. But something does tell me that these creek banks and valleys and hills will be a veritable Armageddon before long. It's time for you to be starting. You'd best be on your way, dear wife. Bear my love to the congregation."

"Every hour, husband, I'll pray for you to come back to me. I need you."

"The greater need is mine. I am more helpless than you are. I'll go get your horse."

"Come into the house. Brother Napier's lad will get the horse. I can't spare you from me a minute."

"I have Colonel Anderson's consent to accompany you through the gap. I can get back to the regiment by night. Go get your things ready."

As they were leaving Mrs. Napier went with them to the gate. "If something happens, Brother Dewitt, so that she can't get through, bring her back here. It wouldn't surprise me to see her coming back. It'd be a blessing to have her with me. I'll get mighty lonesome without her."

17

When they were three miles on their way a great clatter sounded from down the road and four horsemen came into view riding furiously toward them. At first all details were hidden in a fog of dust. They drew nearer and Chaplain Dewitt saw that the rider in front was General Frank Cheatham. The general recognized the preacher and reined his horse to a slithering stop. His comrades followed his example.

"Good morning, ma'am. Good morning, Reverend. You'd best be careful where you ride now."

"My wife is returning to Fayetteville as you thought best, General Cheatham. She has the letter you wrote. She's on her way now."

"It's too late to use it. The whole Yankee Army has broken loose. It's on the march right this minute. She wouldn't have a chance. Sorry, ma'am. They wouldn't let you through now. They're getting ready for battle."

"What'll she do, General Cheatham?"

"Couldn't she stay where she's been?"

"Of course, husband. Of course I can. You remember what Mrs. Napier said."

"I intended to get you on the way yesterday."

"It would have been too late then," said General Cheatham. "The Yankees started moving yesterday morning. We're spying out this area. It looks as though we're going to have to use it. My regards, ma'am, and to you, Reverend."

The four galloped away in a dust cloud.

"Let's be going back," said Mrs. Dewitt. "Mrs. Napier's got work I can help do."

They rode in silence back along the country road. The day was still and peaceful, but a sense of imminence had come into

the very air. The wife was half sorry she couldn't go on to her home in Fayetteville, half glad to stay near her husband. The chaplain was disturbed. He had been at Mill Springs, at Shiloh, at Stone's River. He knew what a battle was. It had about it sights and sounds and terror which he prayed God his wife might be spared. He had no illusions. He would not be spared them.

18

The driver in chief of General Cheatham's supply wagons saw to it that his wagons were put in a sheltered place, a place from which a prompt exit might be made if and when it became desirable. He checked with care the proper feeding of the teams. He went to the creek and washed away the day's accumulation of dirt and dust in one of the pools. Then he sat on a log and talked with his personal helper who bore, by reason of nativity, the name of College Grove.

"What you reckon is about to come to pass? Sumpin is. I got a feeling in my bones," observed College Grove.

"Don't you let it stiffen 'em up any, what with the runnin' you're liable to be called on to do, gittin' away from the Yanks."

"Runnin' is right tarsome," said College Grove complacently. "I've tried it some and I know. Ifn we ketch sight o' any Yanks I think I'll jes ketch holt o' yore coattails an' let you drag me along. I got to save my strength. Ginral Cheatham's got a need for me."

"You'd have been a-runnin' nine miles afore you ever thought of grabbin' anything." The driver paused reflectively. "Ifn I ain't done stopped bein' a fust-rate guesser we a-goin' to see plenty o' Yanks purty soon."

"I kin stay happy and never set eyes on one agin. It's got so I kin do without 'em easy." College Grove sighed plaintively. "I hope it ain't this bad a crop year back at home." He sighed again. "Ifn I had a boy in the Reb Army ever' time the sun set in the east on a Tuesday mawnin' I'd write him a letter." Another sigh. "And that's oftener 'n I been a-hearin'."

"Got so the Yanks git all our mail. I've heard they set aroun' a lot a-readin' it. What you say we go up on that hill 'n see what we can fin' to look at?"

"Ifn they's any lookin' to be done I'm one to he'p."

They followed a vague, tortuous road that climbed patiently. A half hour later they reached the crest of the ridge from which the view opened on distant scenes. Far to the north, beyond the Tennessee River, reared the purplish mass of Walden's Ridge. Chattanooga lay hidden behind hills.

"Looka there." The driver pointed. Low-lying clouds of dust overhung great areas to the west and south. "Yankees," he said. "Yankees! Mo' Yankees 'n you could count up with a whole 'rithmetic book. And they act to me like they done got notions. Take a awful lot of 'em to raise all that dust."

College Grove's right hand rested, palm down, on the log. A hungry horsefly buzzed, lighted on it and made ready for feasting. College Grove looked at it, lifted his eyes to the driver. "Git it," he said laconically.

The driver's whip hissed through the sunlight and the horsefly tumbled crazily to the ground. Appreciatively College Grove regarded his hand, untouched by the whip. "Pardner, ifn I ever git app'inted king or duke or sumpin off in one o' them furrin countries I'm a-goin' to take you along with me as my champeen head-hossfly killer."

The driver studied those far-ranging clouds of dust. "I'm a-gittin' it in my bones too. Sumpin's about to bust loose, and it ain't a-goin' to be long doing it."

College Grove nodded his head to signify that he too understood the implications of the dust. "Old Abe Linkern must a-come down hisself to start up a ruckus like this. How fur off would you say that was?"

The driver contemplated the dust. "Mebbe five, six mile."

For a while nothing was said. The sun traveled its slanting way west. A refreshing breeze stirred lazily along the ridgetop. The monotonous drone of cicadas was heavy upon the September afternoon. Leaves drifted with September languor down from the trees.

Suddenly the driver stood still. "Looka yonder," he said. "That's a funny thing."

His comrade's eyes followed the pointing finger. "What's funny about a wagon? I've saw lots of 'em. A wagon ain't funny."

"Mebbe ifn you used yo' haid from the ears up you'd see sumpin funny too."

Then College Grove became excited. "Why, hit's a Yankee wagon. Anyhow, it's marked like one."

"I thought mebbe sometime you'd take to noticin' things. It's a little too fur to see good, but ain't them fellers on the seat a-wearin' blue clothes?"

"Danged ifn they ain't! Say, ifn the Yanks is that close ain't hit time to start runnin'?"

"They wouldn't send no wagon out ahaid o' the army. What I think is them fellers yonder is lost. Ain't nothing else makes sense to me."

"Ifn they's lost, let's you and me hide 'n find 'em."

"Pardner, sense has fell on you like the dew in the Bible. What we goin' to use for shootin' weepins?"

"Rocks," said College Grove. "I was the best rock thrower in College Grove except one o' the Pettus boys. At twenty feet I can hit a chigger in the left eye. I heard they got a good rock thrower in Bed Forrest's army. I'd like to have a match with him. What you reckon that wagon's got in hit?"

"Mebbe chitlins from College Grove; mebbe mo' Yankees. Ifn it's them, don' you try grabbin' my coattails; you start spread-in' yoahs. And don't fergit Frank Cheatham's army is where you're a-goin' to ifn you hold out."

College Grove picked up a rounded limestone rock larger than an egg and balanced it in his hand. "This here throwin' rock makes me feel sorry for the feller that's a-settin' up there by the driver."

"Stan' back out o' sight. I still say they's sumpin funny about a Yankee wagon bein' this fur from that dust. It jes don' make no sense. I reckon the feller that's a-drivin' is a sort o' lodge brother o' mine, but I expect I got to salivate him." He took

out of his short bosom the whip which was his ever-present refuge in time of crisis. He sensed the proper feel of it in his right hand. "You keep an eye peeled for any shenanigan," he counseled. "They might be some. Sumpin's mighty funny about this."

The wagon was now not over a thousand feet away and plainly audible as it bumped over the heavy stones. The crest of the ridge was thickly timbered. Two of the heaviest trees stood along the road across from each other. College Grove, carefully keeping out of sight of the nearing wagon, chose an ample supply of good throwing rocks. He took position behind one of the big trees, kept three of the rocks in his hand and laid the others down. The driver, whip in hand, concealed himself behind the tree opposite. There they waited.

College Grove said, "Ifn that wagon's got some good pork meat in, mebbe some good home-smoked sausage, why, hit'll jest natchelly make a new man out o' me. And then the Yanks won't have no chancet a-tall."

The driver was singing in low tones the song which in a way had become his battle chant:

"Pull off yo' coat boys, roll up yo' sleeve.
Jordan is a hard road to travel, I believe."

A hundred feet below, the wagon stopped and the horses rested for a minute. The men behind the trees could hear them panting. Then again they were toiling, straining up the hill. At the crest, almost between the two trees, the team was stopped once more for rest. At that moment College Grove's right arm cut a fast arc. A stone flashed toward the man on the left. His quick eyes caught the movement and he ducked with a violence that threw him out of balance. He bumped over the wagon's side, tried to catch it with his hands, but his feet skidded from the wheel's hub and his hands were jerked loose. He fell sprawling to the ground. The fall did no more than jar him. He summoned a convulsive effort to spring catlike to his feet, but the effort died away. College Grove was standing above him, his throwing arm cocked most ominously.

"You jes so much as wiggle a little finger and you're a dead Yank."

"I'm no Yank."

"Then I aim to make one out o' you with this here rock."

The man glimpsed the rock again and lay still, his face over-spread with dismay mingled with surprise.

While this was going on, one driver had taken charge of another. While College Grove's rock was in the air, Cheatham's driver lashed out with his whip. The victim screamed and his hand jerked to his wounded jaw.

"Climb down!" said the man with the whip. "Climb down and surrender to me and Jeff Davis. Ever' time I use this here whup the sufferin' gits wuss, and the time's jes about come fer me to use it again."

"I'll get down. Keep that thing still. I'll get down." He jumped from his seat. The driver waited for him with whip held in threat.

"I got mine," yelled College Grove from the other side. "I got him where he's goin' to stay got."

"Watch him," answered the driver. "Yanks done been to school to Old Satan hisself."

"Who's that?" demanded the fellow on the ground. "I know who that feller is. Bring him here."

"You be still! I'm a-warnin' you." College Grove's throwing arm made meaningful motions.

"You jes so much as tech a hair on my haid 'n Bed Forrest'll hang you."

"Yanks is crazier 'n bedbugs. They don't know which side the ginrals is on."

"Better watch him," called the driver. "Don't let him git to argyfyin'. Mine's quieted down."

"I know that man. Let me see him. I tell you I'm no Yank. I'm a-spyin' for Bed Forrest."

"Jes like I'm a-spyin' fer ol' Abe Linkern. Hey, pardner, he says he's a Reb spy."

"I'm a-comin' aroun' there to see him. He soun's like a feller I knowed oncet." The driver spoke to his prisoner. "You walk

ahaid o' me, an' ifn you want to live you behave yo'self and don't you let me misjedge you. That'd shore bring on trials and tribulations!"

They rounded the panting horses. The driver said to College Grove, "You watch this'n. Lemme git a good look at that feller."

"You know me," shouted the man on the ground. "Don't you tech me with that whup. You ricollect, don' you, that time we rid with you gittin' away from Nashville?"

"Well, I'll be bit by a two-headed snake! What you doin' here in that gitup?"

"Same as when I rid with you that time. I'm a-spyin' fer Bed Forrest."

"Yankees provide Reb spies with wagons to ride in?"

"I talked this feller into givin' me a ride, and then I showed him the way."

"What you been doin' in Chattanooga?"

"I done told you I'm still a-workin' for Bed Forrest. He sent me."

"You can git up now." The driver turned to College Grove. "This feller ain't lyin'. But that one is a Yank, an' I don't keer much ifn you do salivate him. Any feller that won't ease hosses up a hill like this is fitten for what he gits. I aims to palaver a spell with this here spy."

He motioned the spy to a seat on a log. "You ride all the way from Chattanooga?"

"There was a passel o' wagons coming out the same time I was and I had me a idea. I picked the last one."

"And the wagon bruk down, and it took you so long to fix it that you got behin', and the rest of them had already gone on. Then you had to tell this feller the way and you jes natchelly got mixed up in the mind and told him the wrong fork to take."

"That's jes about the way it was."

"It's right funny about that wagon breakin' down."

"I thought you'd figger it out that-a-way."

"I reckon I got soothsayin' blood in me," said the driver modestly. "What's in that wagon?"

"Chloryform and a lot of other drugstore stuff," answered Sergeant Goforth.

"Chloryform? What's that?" asked the driver.

Then he remembered. They'd had a little of the precious fluid at Stone's River, but it was used up by the time a tenth of the mangled gray-clad soldiers had felt its mercy. Chloroform! What a boon, with a battle to be fought tomorrow, the next day, next week! He climbed nimbly to the wagon's seat and peered back into its cavernous depths. He could see dimly boxes stacked on boxes. Drugstore stuff! What was it he'd heard Dr. Rice say less than a week before? That he'd seen two hundred men die needlessly at Shiloh for lack of common drugs. He was talking with Dr. Cowan of Forrest's command. What was it Chaplain Dewitt had told him last Sunday? That there were plenty of soldiers in Cheatham's army who needed castor oil more than preaching. Drugstore stuff! Chloroform! All sorts o' physic! And a battle forming!

Goforth's natural confidence had been restored. He addressed College Grove. "Lucky for you you can't throw no better 'n that. If you'da teched me with that rock you'd have to settle with Bed Forrest."

"You dodged," answered College Grove in an aggrieved tone. "Ifn you hadn't, I'da shore salivated you. I'da knocked you deader 'n four o'clock. And ifn Bed don't want his men to git hurt, you go tell him to keep Yankee clothes offn 'em."

"You tell him yo'self," shouted Goforth, "and see how long you stay alive."

"Ca'm yo'self, gents," said the driver soothingly. "This ain't the time for two o' the best men in the whole Reb Army to be a-sassin' each other. And them's the words I taken outa the mouths o' Bed Forrest and Frank Cheatham both. Thunderation, what we havin'—a parade? Who's that a-comin' yondah?"

They looked down the ridge road that led northward into a narrow level valley. A mile away four horsemen galloped madly toward them.

"Yankees, and they're hot-trackin' this here wagon! Hey you!" He pointed to Sergeant Goforth. "Take this wagon and

drive with that pistol in your right hand p'inted right at him." He indicated the unhappy prisoner. "And shoot ifn he winks a eye. Frank Cheatham's army ain't a mile down this road. Holler quick to the picket so he won't plug you."

"I got to git a message to Bed Forrest."

"Ginral Cheatham'll help you find him. College Grove 'n me's got business to attend to. Gimme that gun! Hurry!" He reached into the wagon, took a rifle from it and stepped out of the way.

The wagon, loaded with precious supplies, left hurriedly for Frank Cheatham's army.

"Pardner, what's on yo' mind this time?" asked College Grove admiringly. "It's hosses, ain't it?"

"Jes about. You git you some mo' good throwin' rocks and then hide right over there. And you limber up that throwin' arm good and plenty. I'll stay on the other side."

"I ain't a-missin' this time."

"I ain't a-aimin' for you to. Now you pick out the one that it'd do the most good to salivate and let him have it. I'll take this shootin' weepin and act like I'm Ginral Bed Forrest hisself. Hurry!"

The approaching horsemen were coming up the long ridge, their progress slowed to a brisk canter.

The driver took his place in a tangle of underbrush on the east side of the road, and College Grove behind the tree he had used before.

"Don't throw too soon," counseled the driver. "Don't chuck that rock till they're even with you or a mite ahead. I'm a-dependin' on you, pardner."

The four soldiers were topping the ridge rim. The driver noted with approval the quality of the horses they rode. Frank Cheatham could use such horses. Those soldiers must wish desperately to recapture the wagon or they wouldn't venture so recklessly into enemy territory.

Now they were only a few feet away. Now they were passing. There was a movement across the road, and the thud of something hard striking against something less hard. One of the four,

clearly the leader, groaned with great suddenness, a groan which ended with a struggling intake of breath. He slumped forward and sidewise on his horse. By that time the other three had reined in their horses to a quick stop. One threw himself to the ground and ran to his stricken leader.

The driver called from his ambush. "I pronounces you tee-totally surrounded and absotively captured, and I'll shoot the haid offn any feller that denies it. Git down offn them hosses, and you, feller, standin' there by the ginral, or whatever he is, don't you tech him. Git back with them other two and line up." They moved closer together. "Throw them pistols out there on this side o' the road." He called to imaginary comrades. "Shoot 'em, men, ifn they don't act quick."

College Grove came out from behind the tree where he had taken shelter again after firing the first stone. The men were facing the driver's thicket and didn't see him. At that moment the officer, half sitting, half lying unconscious on his horse, slumped so far to one side that all balance was lost and he fell by installments to the ground, his head striking first and the rest of him following. The soldier closest to him gave a frightened jump but that was as far as he got. He crumpled to the road, the victim of one of College Grove's throwing rocks.

"Don' you other two Yanks make no mistake and go to gittin' fidgety," yelled College Grove. "I'm jes now gittin' the kinks out o' me, and I'm pizen when I do."

"Throw them pistols over here," demanded the driver from his hiding place. "I told you oncet already."

"What you say, Ginral? Want me to bounce a rock offn the belly o' the fat one?"

The fat one grabbed his front with his free hand and frantically pitched his pistol to the side of the road with his other. His companion threw his pistol too. The driver came from out his clump of shrubbery with rifle at ready. He took the pistol from College Grove's second victim who was groaning most wretchedly and making no effort to get up. Then the driver took the pistol from the still unconscious captain. He looked at him, said to one of the two standing by, "Lift him up," and to College

Grove, "Git them pistols. We a-goin' to git away from here. Ain't neither one o' them bad hurt."

19

A half hour later a strange procession arrived at General Cheatham's headquarters. Ahead rode two shamefaced and dejected Union soldiers. Behind them sat woebegone and stricken comrades, one of them only partly conscious. The driver and College Grove brought up the rear, each splendidly mounted and not in the slightest degree lacking in manifest pride and shooting weapons. They received a royal welcome when their booty was appraised.

General Cheatham expressed himself with the roar by which he could inspire victory or strike dismay. "Where'd you find them? And how far did they chase you before you give up and let them surrender?" His eyes kindled with the pride of a Middle-Tennessean. "Look at them horses! Finest Yankee horses I ever laid my eyes on. Look at them! They never come from across any Ohio River. I'll lay ten dollars to two bits they're Tennessee horses. They stole them—that's how they got them."

He regarded the driver with warm approval. "And Yankee stealing ought to be punished. You men did right. It set a good example."

"Yes, sir, Ginral, and did you see anything of a Yankee wagon druv by one o' Bed's—I mean Ginral Forrest's—spies?"

"*Did I?* Dr. Rice's a-layin' in a dead faint for pure joy right this minute, and Dr. Erskine has just come to. What'll happen to Dr. Cowan when part of this stuff gets to Forrest's army I hate to think. I didn't know there was so much medicine left in the world. There are twenty-four great big bottles of quinine in there. Since no man with the ague is a good fighting man I couldn't be better pleased. There's chloroform in that wagon, gallons of it, thank God!"

He looked around. "Where's Forrest's man that brought the wagon? I want to see him. Fetch him here. President Davis

ought to thank him in person. The South hasn't had such a blessing since they put a horse under Bed Forrest."

"He's already gone, General, sir," explained one of the officers. "He left five minutes ago. He was in a hurry to get to General Forrest."

"We're going to divide this medicine with General Forrest. I'd never be able to look Bed in the face if I didn't. Besides, it'd be fair. It was his man that worked the shenanigan."

"The man that left here awhile ago said it would be all for General Forrest," an aide remarked.

"All?" yelled Frank Cheatham in his hoarse voice. "All? Whose army got it first? He'll get part of it, but I'm not going to have my doctors fainting for nothing."

20

Hunter Cragwall told Lieutenant Nichol that it would be easier for him to get out of Chattanooga by day than by night. For some reason the guards were tripled after nightfall, and zeal was more intense. Matters were relatively relaxed in the daytime. He had slept well during the night. At moments his head felt large and filled with vague and diffused uneasiness. At other moments everything was normal.

The sun was shining. It would be another hot day. There wasn't much sound on the street—incidental passing of man and horse but nothing more. A faraway rumble sounded to the southward, a sort of dim distant continuous mass of noise. That, Nichol thought, would be wagons moving in unbroken procession on by Rossville out to where the Northern armies were encamped. The day was hot, and the road was dusty, but over it was flowing in endless supply the materials of war. This would be something that General Forrest knew about already. He made a point of learning early of such obvious things. Indeed, it was his wont to learn that such matters were going to happen while the plan was still forming. Surely, Nichol thought, Goforth had

already reached Forrest with the news that great issues were moving toward a crisis—a movement of which those rumbling wagons were a phase. Where was Crockett? But he couldn't search for Crockett till he was most expertly disguised.

Hunter Cragwall had promised to alter in marked degree all the particulars of his appearance. She was to do it at the latest before noon. Where was she? He was under promise not to leave until she had finished with him. He was hungry. He needed his breakfast. But he needed to see her too. In the afternoon he would hunt up Crockett. The captain could plan matters better than he could. But he was as resourceful in an emergency. He would find Crockett and together they would make their plans. There probably wasn't much need for them to stay longer in the city. And yet it almost surely would be used as the base for very vital activities. Crockett would likely know about that.

Hunter knocked on the door and came into the room, and the beauty of the world came in with her.

"You are positively lovelier than ever."

"How desolate it will make me if you ever start talking rationally again!"

"I have no pain. I have no fever. I am as well as a man can be. I am as rational as God ever lets me be. And no mortal man is as much in love as I."

Smiling, she matched his grandiloquence. "And no mortal maid ever paid for love with such usury of love."

"Your speech bears the savor of Shakespeare, my love. Also, I'm hungry, famished. How fit an accompaniment for love is food!"

"Breakfast is served in the dining room."

She led him through the hall. They both fell silent while he was eating. She had eaten earlier. He wondered who else was in the house. He had heard no proof of the presence of anyone else. It was a good house with definite touches of elegance. It was no common table at which he sat, and the china and silver were far from ordinary.

When the edge of his hunger had been dulled he sat with his eyes on her, feasting. "Tell me your plans."

"Yours are more important. Tell them to me."

"I can use my eyes and ears for Bed Forrest. That's something I can do. I'll stay here as long as I am needed, or until——"

"Don't say it. What a cruel thing is war! And yet if there had been no war I'd never have seen you."

"You're wrong there. You were born to be seen by me. If not war then something else would have brought us together, my dear. It had to happen. Some fine day in Nashville or elsewhere I'd have passed you on the street or met you at a party and I'd have recognized you just as I did in the cobbler's shop in Nashville. This is a purposeful world."

"Purposeful enough for a happy ending?"

"I do not doubt it."

"But before that some anxious hours?"

"Yes," he said quietly, "but I can face them, believing in the happy ending."

After an interval in which they sat in silence, each looking at the other tenderly, he said, "I think I'd better leave toward noon. The Yankees are perhaps less watchful then."

"Going back to General Forrest?"

"Yes, but I'll try to find Captain Crockett first. He'll know, as always, what to do. I won't wait too long to find him, and if I can't I'll start back."

"Do you feel sure you can reach General Forrest?"

"Oh, yes," he said happily, "I'm to be preserved for the happy ending."

"That means that I'll be too."

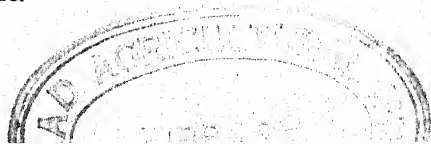
"Of course. I'd not wish preservation otherwise. But I want to know how safe it is for you here."

"I'm a soldier too. I'll have no other perils than the ordinary ones of war. I'll be preserved."

"But who else is here? Are you alone? The place sounds deserted."

"I'm safe here, as safe as a soldier can be."

"Who lives here?"



"The people who own this house are very nice people indeed. But I'm under a solemn pledge, dear, to say no more to anyone. You can trust me."

"Of course, of course, but there's something odd about it. Whom do you disguise?"

"Those like you who need it. This morning while you were sleeping so soundly I disguised one of General Cheatham's men for a trip into central Kentucky. He's sent to bring fifty horses back with him."

"I think you'd better devote some of your art to me. Captain Whitaker seems very observant. Listen, dear: do you have any idea where Crockett is?"

"No, I don't. I know that he has left Mrs. Whitesides', and that she has gone too."

"Somebody's getting nosy. Well, I don't think Crockett will leave Chattanooga without getting me word. He's still here. If someone knocked on that door I'd expect to see Crockett come in."

"He won't knock on that door. I don't believe even as wise a man as your friend would find this house, and yet it's on one of the best streets."

"The Yankees will find it," he said gloomily. "With men dropping in casually on their way to Kentucky after horses, they'll find it."

"I suppose they will, but I hope that before they do we can give the South a great deal of help. If they become suspicious I'll be told of it in time to leave safely just as Mrs. Whitesides did."

"Where'll you go?"

"I don't know, but have no fear; a place will be provided. General Forrest thinks of everything."

"Odd stuff is really a part of my business, but this is odd indeed." She said nothing. He changed the subject. "It was cloudy that day I first saw you in the cobbler's shop at Nashville. A little later it rained, but for me the sun was shining."

"It is now."

"It always is while you're near."

She smiled. "A rain would be much better now than this sunshine."

"The sun shone that day during the rain, shone from your presence and will always shine in my memory of you."

"It was the first time I ever saw you, the very first time, and yet when you had gone I sat and looked out the little window, and though the rain was falling outside I didn't see it. I just saw you. My sun was shining too."

"I pray for peace. I don't want to be killed and I don't want to kill anyone. There's something desperately wrong to make killing a part of one's business. All I want is your blessed presence and war with no one."

"Amen, and God keep us till then!"

When she had finished with her artistry she handed Lieutenant Nichol a mirror. What he saw was a major surprise. His hair was no longer coal-black but dark-brown with a glint of dull-red. His nose bore the appearance of greater size and a slightly altered contour. Luxuriant burnside's rippled down the length of his cheeks. Even his eyes were strangely shaped.

Nichol looked at himself long and wonderingly. "All right," he said a little nervously. "All right. Now tell me who I am?"

"That has been arranged. We had good luck yesterday. Our pickets captured two Yankee officers in a lonely section about Ooltewah. They were coming down on an errand from General Burnside."

"I always liked General Burnside. I shall serve under him with pleasure. Proceed, please."

"The two officers have disappeared, temporarily. At least one of them will reappear presently. Then, as that quick mind of yours has doubtless grasped, it will be you. You'll ride the officer's horse, you'll wear his clothes, you'll have all his papers and effects, you'll memorize in detail the nature of his mission, you'll speak his words and speak them with his voice—as nearly as you can imagine his voice."

"Why, it's better than a play."

"You'll proceed to General Rosecrans with the message——"

"Oughtn't General Forrest—or somebody—know what's in it?"

"He does—if nothing happened to the messenger we sent with a copy of it."

"Where are they, these officers?"

"I don't know. I've been told that their quarters are respectable, and quite secure."

"I've just been a messenger from General Grant. Now, presto, I become a messenger from General Burnside. Bulwer-Lytton couldn't have imagined it."

"Your luck holds better than you think. From the sketch and description I have, you're of the same build and weight as Lieutenant Gordon Chapin whose home before the war was Lawrenceburg, Indiana. You're now the best likeness of Lieutenant Chapin I can make of you."

He surveyed himself again in the mirror. "Ah!" he said. "The Chapins are nice people, very nice people indeed. I'll try hard to measure up to the family's high standards. I'll endeavor to live the true life of the Chapins. Let it never be said that I left a blot on the Chapin honor."

"Nor made an error in the Chapin speech."

"Never. Let's see. Lawrenceburg, if my memory serves, is in southern Indiana, near Kentucky. I think I can manage the speech very well. No drawl, no slurring, no Northern brittleness. There might be a little flavor of the German in the community but the Chapins would have none of it. Very different people. No, for them the best drawl of Kentucky with a subtle touch of Indiana hardness. I assure you, my dear, that their speech will go untarnished."

"Here are the papers he had—message, pass, everything. You should study them until you've mastered them in every detail. I have Lieutenant Chapin's clothes for you and I believe the fit will be perfect."

"Ever since I've been in the army I've been walking about in captured Yankees' uniforms. It's got to be one of my most noticeable habits. By the way, do you have Chapin's shoes, too?"

"Yes, I have, but you won't need them, will you? You already have two pairs."

He looked ruefully at the shoes he wore. They were rich in color, of fine leather and workmanship, but scratched from hard wear.

"I'd like to change," he said. "I'm a trifle superstitious about these shoes. I'd prefer Chapin's. We'll try his, if you don't mind. You'll have to keep these—that is, if Chapin's fit."

"Very well, a use can be found for them. At ten minutes to one you'll go into the Presbyterian Church. A few minutes later a soldier will come in. Soldiers often go into the church. Pay no attention to him. At one o'clock you'll come out of the church, get on the horse hitched at the door and ride off as if it were the natural thing to do. You're from that moment Lieutenant Chapin, and you bear a message for General Rosecrans."

"Perfect," he said delightedly. "Oh, perfect! Never a play as good as this."

"It's ten o'clock. You have two hours to dress, memorize your papers and make your plans. At noon we'll eat together." She looked at him with eyes shining and tender. "These hours have been so precious." He said nothing but clasped her hand tightly in his. She said, "You must go. I want you to go. But I pray God for peace and for the time to come when you can stay with me always."

At twelve o'clock he came out of his room and, except for the hat, was fully dressed for the role of Lieutenant Chapin.

Hunter Cragwall caught the look on his face. "What's wrong?"

"The shoes," he answered soberly. "What sort of fellow is Chapin with feet three numbers smaller than the rest of him? I could get only four toes in."

She glanced at his feet. "The shoes you got from that boy seem all right."

"I told you about them. They used to belong to my fellow alumnus from Princeton, and he's an observant man. He's too

likely to pop up. He's a great fellow to pop up. It would be just like him."

"Let me have them," she said. "I was afraid this would happen."

He took them off and sat in his stocking feet waiting. She came back and handed the shoes to him.

He saw that the proper use of shoeblack had given them an appearance which would deceive even Captain Whitaker's sharp eyes. Nichol looked at them approvingly. "Old Hawk Eye himself wouldn't know them unless he saw more than the visible."

Food was on the table and they ate. It was good but already loneliness was in their souls. When would they eat together again? When?

It was time to part. They went to the door, and he held her tightly in his arms.

"I'll believe in the happy ending too," she whispered. "I'll believe in it whatever comes."

"When I stop believing in it, all will be lost for me."

"When shall I see you again?"

"I wonder whether at the price paid a war can ever be won. We'll see each other next when God wills it. He'll will it, dear. I do not doubt it. It would be a ghastly trick to give us this glimpse of heaven and then shut the gate."

"Help God by taking no risk you can avoid."

"And the same advice to you, my love."

"It's time for you to go," she whispered.

"Yes. God be with us both!"

He released her. His hand was on the doorknob when they heard the *clack clack* of a horse's hoofs on the street outside. There was nothing unusual in that, but she moved quickly to one side and glanced out the window. "You can't go now," she said.

He, too, looked covertly and for a second his heart lost its beat. The Northern officer riding slowly along the street was Captain Ralph Whitaker. No doubt of it.

"Who is it?" she asked. "Who is it?"

The set look on his face relaxed into a wan smile. "That's the man I was telling you about, the man who struck me in the church, the man who used to own these shoes."

Her eyes were at the window. "He's not looking at the house. He seems to be looking everywhere for something but doesn't know where he should expect to see it. He's not stopping; he's not even halting. Listen: there's another way. You can go out the back door and down the grape arbor and through a vacant lot to the street in the rear. You'd better be starting. When you get to the street turn to the right. You know where to find the church."

They paused at the back door, and again she was in his arms and the moments were precious.

Then over their world swept a flood of song. It was a mockingbird in a back-yard maple tree singing its immortal serenade to lovers.

"Oh," she said breathlessly, "I never heard one sing at this time of day!"

"Something special, dearest, a reminder that all will be well and that there'll be a happy ending."

"Listen," she said.

The mockingbird ran a trill, and its notes were true and joyful. Again the trill climbed and broke upon the heights with an outpouring strangely at variance with the hot somnolence of midday.

"That bird has followed me from Walden's Ridge. It saved my life then. And now it tells me why."

"It's not the same one. It couldn't be."

"Oh, my dear, don't you know that romance is the highest reality. Thanks, old fellow." He nodded gaily in the bird's direction. "Good-by, and sing for my girl when she needs it. Good-by, Hunter. The happy ending is ahead."

He walked rapidly through the yard, under the maple tree in which the mockingbird still sat, though silent, through the grape arbor and vacant lot into the street at the back. People were on the street but none gave him a second look. He went down the street, bore to the right and presently reached the church. The

door was open and he went inside and sat in one of the pews. No one else was there. A minute or two later a man entered by the other door. Out of the corner of his eye Nichol saw that he was a stranger. Nichol sat waiting while he counted fifty. Then he arose and quietly walked out the door and onto the street.

21

A horse stood hitched to the fence dozing in the hot sunlight which poured flush on it. It heard the man's step and lifted its head, and Nichol saw that it was a good animal. He unhitched it, threw the reins over the head, swung himself up into the saddle and rode away down the street with his eyes searching the road that ran southward. Ahead of him with curious angular grace Lookout Mountain reared itself into the sky. The road which he must reach lay eastward from the mountain. The heat of deep summer and the devastation of drought was on the place, but the scene before him was still an uplifting one. Below were the Crutchfield House and the railroad station. In the yards a confusion of engines whistled and belched smoke as they clanked about, moving boxcars into a semblance of order. He saw something else: a dozen wagons standing in line by some boxcars and a congested group of blue-clad soldiers furiously at work in between. They were carrying from those cars and placing in those wagons supplies for the armies, the nourishment of battle. Two blocks away he saw more wagons already loaded and moving southward. To the right rose Cameron Hill, and at its summit the Stars and Stripes drooped languidly for lack of breeze. Far to the right across the Tennessee River, Walden's Ridge stood etched against a dim purplish haze. Above it rose a little cloud, its edges rimmed with gold from the noonday sun.

Nichol knew in general how to reach the road he wanted. At a corner he turned into a street that led southward. Then he saw what his eyes had been searching for: a long low-lying cloud of dust marking as if on a map the route to the main armies. He knew the peril he was riding into, but he had good reason to know also the peril he was riding out of. He would reach Gen-



eral Rosecrans as soon as he could and deliver the communication he bore. Perhaps the general would wish to send a reply by him. The telegraph wires to Knoxville were most uncertain. Very well, if there was a message answering General Burnside he'd bear it as far as General Forrest's headquarters.

A mile later he turned into the main road. Dust lay inches-deep in the shallowest parts, reddish-gray and pulverized to an incredible fineness. Rails on the old fences were thickly coated with dust. The leaves that remained on the vines, shrubs and trees were heavy with it. Apparently some time had elapsed since the passage of the last wagons, but he knew more would be coming soon. His horse stirred the dust and wisps of it arose above his head. After a while the road mounted steadily and he noticed that his horse was wet with sweat. Two officers passed him galloping back toward town but they merely waved as they went by. He heard far behind him the rumble of oncoming wagons, doubtless the ones he had seen leaving town.

How lovely Hunter had been, lovely and altogether desirable! He rode beside a half-dry creek; there were pools of water still held in depressions of its bed. Presently he reached a little stony path that led down to it. He turned his horse into the path and after much stumbling and recovering reached the water. The horse drank long and gratefully. Nichol dismounted and, holding the reins, moved to another pool and drank his fill. The water was hot and ill-flavored but it served. He sat on an outcropping rock and waited for his horse to rest. He heard the wagons come to a stop a few hundred yards down the road. He could tell from the sounds that the teamsters were carrying water to the horses in buckets. After they had finished drinking the wagons remained still. The horses were resting.

Nichol heard a single horse approaching at a canter. Probably some horseman trying to get ahead of the dust. The rider reached the path down to the creek and stopped suddenly, then reined the horse into the path. It too stumbled and skidded to the dry stones of the creek bed, and came to a stop a few feet from where Nichol was standing.

"Good afternoon," said the rider.

Beasley Nichol saw that the man was Captain Ralph Whitaker! For a second his heart didn't beat but he got it back under control as quickly as it would respond to his will. "Good afternoon," he said, and there was no hint of Alabama in his tones, but the solid substantial plain speech of southern Indiana. Nichol was no longer frightened, only surprised. The Northern officer might not be his equal in personal combat, but he must remember that reinforcements for his enemy were only a short distance down the road and likely to move nearer at any moment. He saw that Whitaker was studying him closely, but from the look in the man's eyes he knew that he had not been recognized, that his disguise though probed had not been pierced. "It's a hot day," he remarked.

"It's hot every day," said the Yankee. "What's your name? What army are you with?"

"You hurry your questions a bit, Captain, and I don't answer them till I know with whom I'm talking. No offense," he added hurriedly, "but one who follows my business has to be careful. Otherwise he wouldn't be in it."

"True, true. I apologize. I am Captain Ralph Whitaker of General Rosecrans' scouts. I know what it means to be careful. My credentials, Lieutenant." He passed over a packet of papers which Nichol read through, while noting Whitaker carefully from the corner of his eye. He handed the papers back and waited for a brief instant in thought. Then Nichol gave Whitaker his pass through the lines.

Whitaker studied the papers and returned them. "From General Burnside, eh?"

Am impish impulse entered Nichol's mind. "Are you on your way to General Rosecrans? Perhaps I could be of help. I'm familiar with this country."

"No, my business is in Chattanooga."

"I have the notion, Captain Whitaker, that you did not ride down here to water your horse."

"Quite right. I wanted to see who you were."

"Am I under suspicion?"

"Not now. I have a problem on my hands in town, a problem

of my own making. I have a quixotic sense of justice. I'm looking for a man, a Rebel spy, and I was told that a single horseman was riding this way——" He broke off to stare at Nichol's shoes. "What odd shoes!" he said.

"They were issued me two months ago in Cincinnati," answered Nichol a bit coldly. "They've been very serviceable. What's odd about them?"

"Their shape reminds me of a pair I once owned. I don't think I ever saw shoes before of just that color."

His eyes searched Beasley Nichol's form and face—and found nothing. But Nichol's eyes were searching, too, though very casually, and they found that the other was wearing the shoes taken from him two nights before in the church. They were the very shoes; there was no mistaking them. Whitaker had indeed a quixotic feeling for justice.

"One other thing occurs to me as rather odd," Whitaker was saying. "The shoes that I used to own had strings exactly like yours."

"I don't know much about shoestrings. I thought they were all alike," said Nichol dryly. "I'm becoming curious about your interest in shoes."

"Black strings with bright red tips. I bought mine in Buffalo. I was rather proud of them."

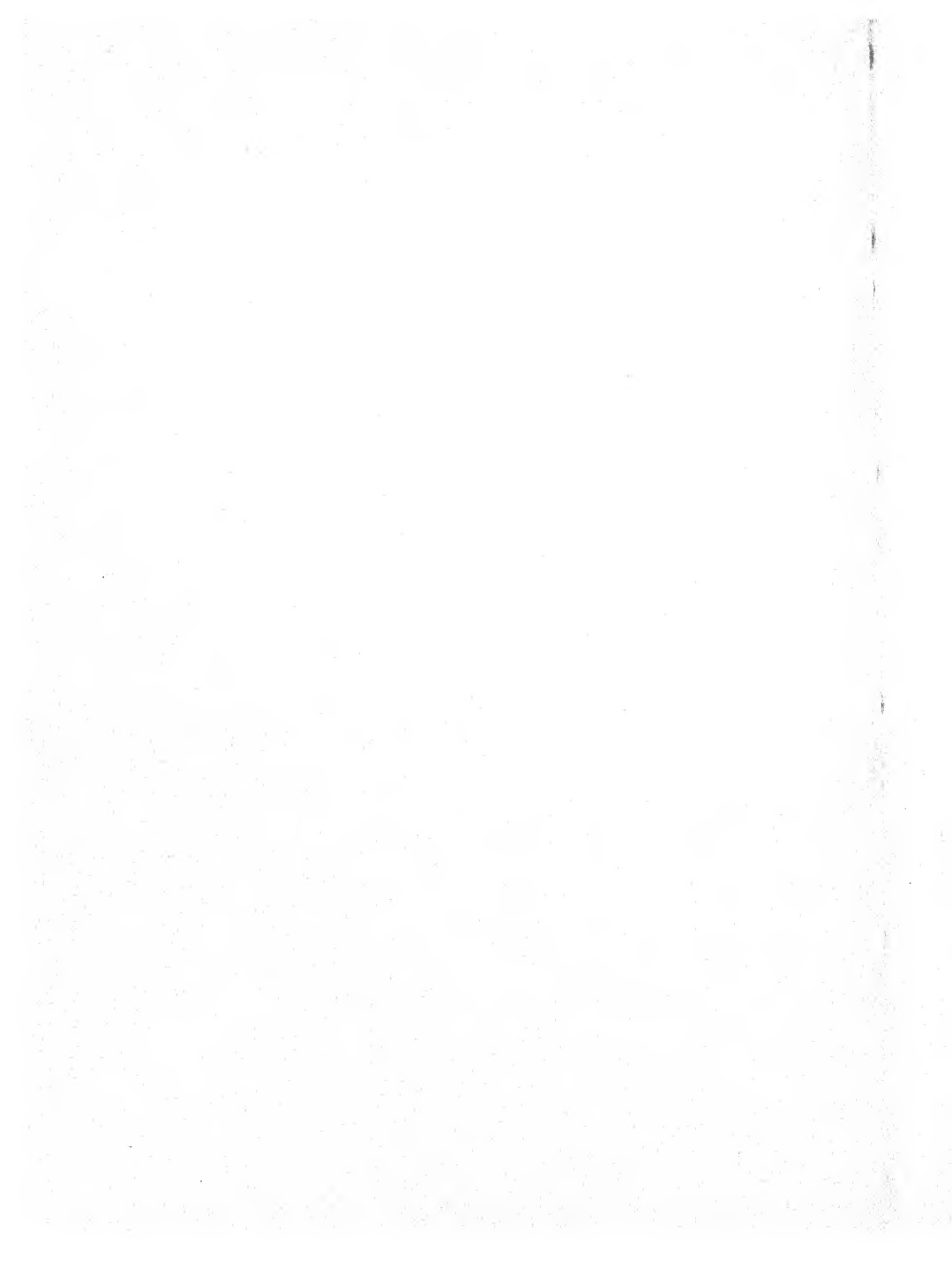
"These came from Cincinnati, as I told you. They came with the shoes. I want to reach General Rosecrans tonight. I guess I'd better be on my way."

Whitaker was apparently undecided. He looked Nichol over again, mounted his horse and rode up the path into the road and toward Chattanooga.

"It's better than a play," said Nichol delightedly. "I wonder just exactly what's on that fellow's mind." Then he, too, mounted his horse and rode southward. The wagons down the road were beginning to roll.

PART IV

A MOCKINGBIRD SANG
ON THE BATTLEFIELD



A Mockingbird Sang on the Battlefield

1

GENERAL ROSECRANS sat in his tent at field headquarters. He was troubled, for the situation into which the armies were forming was not to his liking. The weather was not to his liking. A great many things were not. The soldiers almost without exception were burned to a brick red. Their feet were blistered from the heat of the sun and the friction of interminable marching. Their uniforms were a compound of dust and sweat.

"You could make brick out of what I got inside me," said a private in Turchin's brigade.

"Not what I got in me," replied a comrade. "You'd have to add water first."

That was it. Thirst was the common affliction of this campaign and its wretchedness tortured the soldiers of both armies. Water for cooking, water for soldiers, water for horses—there wasn't enough water to go around in the parched country. The soldiers marched through the heat and the dust and turned aside their discomfort with dreams of happy days to come, of the time when there would be all the cool, clear water one could drink. The horses dreamed of green pastures flecked with spreading shade trees, and streams of water running over little waterfalls whose ripple and splash could be heard throughout the day. Those were great yearnings, but the realities were a blazing sun, palpable dust, dirt and a thirst that turned the throat into torment.

But General Rosecrans was plagued by matters no less baffling than the weather. He was living a baffled life. For one instance, a superior officer named Halleck sat in a comfortable chair in Washington and in pompous phrase told Rosecrans what to think

long after he'd thought it, and what to do long after it had been done. Worse than all was the sense of vague futility that pervaded the troops, that left them inert when they should be infused by the foretaste of triumph. They had crossed rivers, marched over mountains and into coves. They had gone southward, merely to retrace the long weary way. The men could see no plan in it all. A battle was imminent, but would it be an accidental collision or the proper climax of a maneuver? It looked more like a collision. General Rosecrans was bewildered by the enemy. General Bragg had made almost no move that he expected, and some of Bragg's movements he could not fathom even after they were made. He was bowed beneath most of the plagues that can harass a military leader.

He pored over a map on a crude table. General McCook, General Thomas and General Crittenden sat in the tent with him.

"The battle," said General Rosecrans in his melancholy voice, "will open perhaps tomorrow, certainly not later than the next day."

"The next day, I earnestly hope," said General Thomas. "We're not ready now."

"Early tomorrow," the commanding general said, "our whole line is to move down the Chickamauga in order of battle. I wish the Lafayette Road toward Chattanooga covered. General McCook, move in closer to General Thomas. But don't give up your position at—" he used a reading glass, for the print was not very legible, and his eyes were not strong—"Crawfish Spring. Give any needed help to General Crittenden's right. The cavalry is to watch the Chickamauga bridges and to act under General McCook's orders. Does anyone wish to discuss any matters I have raised, or should have raised?"

"Hold the battle off thirty-six or forty-eight hours if you can," said General Thomas. "I need that much time. I simply cannot be ready before then."

"I don't at all understand General Bragg, gentlemen. He has had so many unused advantages that surely he'll co-operate with you this once, General Thomas, in deferring conflict."

"We've been incredibly lucky," said General Thomas, "in that

Bragg and not Forrest is the Rebels' commander in chief. I flinch to consider——"

"Precisely, sir," broke in Rosecrans, "and do not fail to instruct all scouts to observe Forrest very alertly."

"General Forrest is difficult to observe closely," said Crittenden dryly. "I've tried it. He doesn't show himself often for our observation."

"All the more reason for it to be done, and continuously. You must move quickly, General Thomas, very quickly. There's a great deal of peril in your present position. Use all speed, if you please. You, General McCook, close up promptly as soon as General Thomas gets out of the way. I wish all of you to meet at the Widow Glenn's tomorrow evening at six o'clock. Gentlemen, I am now going to church to pray. I believe in prayer, believe in it most devoutly."

He left the tent with quick choppy steps.

"He's riding all the way in to Chattanooga to pray in the Catholic Church," said General McCook.

General Crittenden sighed. "We are going to need prayer," he said.

2

At that same moment five miles south and eastward General Nathan Bedford Forrest sat on a log and talked with Generals Alexander P. Stewart, Frank Cheatham and Pat Cleburne. General Forrest held the reins of his horse in one hand and with the other used a pocket knife to whittle aimlessly the bark of the log on which he was sitting. At intervals he would lay his knife on the log, pick up a stick and break it with a snap. Then he'd go on with his whittling. Two hundred feet away in the twilight shadows loomed the Post Oak Church. The night about them was reasonably calm, though distant sounds murmured and rumbled constantly. Back in the woods a whippoorwill sounded in reiteration its melancholy call. There was the continuous silken rustle of leaves drifting downward from the trees.

"The thing I dread most about this, tomorrow or the next day

or whenever it comes, is the lack of water," said Frank Cheatham. "A soldier can carry a canteen, a pint or a quart maybe, and it will last a little while, but what about the horses? It's terrible to see a horse wounded, but we can shoot it then and put it out of its misery. We don't shoot a horse suffering for water. I never before saw it this dry in Tennessee."

"We're in Georgia now," said Pat Cleburne.

"Yes, I know, but wherever it is, it's no time to fight a battle. It's beyond endurance, horse or human."

"We mustn't get too far away from the creek," said Forrest, speaking for the first time. "We must keep a water supply, and this is the only supply there is—maybe a few wells, but none to count. The Blue Spring at the Napiers' is good water, but it's pretty far away."

"The creek is our only hope," added General Cleburne. "The Yankees are better placed. There are a few everlasting springs in the ground they occupy, big springs. They have the advantage in water."

"For which they should thank General Bragg," Forrest said. "We could have had them springs and them hills, too, and we're going to need both."

"How do you size up the prospects, Bedford? How do you figure the chances?" General Cheatham cast aside formality with a fellow Middle-Tennessean.

"Depends on several things, mainly generals. By the best figurin' we can do the armies is about the same size. The Yanks got the best cannon. We got the best cavalry. The chances is neither one is goin' to be used much. This country don't fit itself much to hosses or cannon. It's going to be man-to-man rifle and swo'd. They got the hills; we got the woods. All the cleared groun' hereabouts is between us. It's goin' to depend on you, Alex Stewart, and you, Frank Cheatham, and men like you. They got one general I wish they didn't have. That's George Thomas. I'll take my chances on the rest o' them."

"What about their commanding officer, General Rosecrans? What do you think of him?"

"He's like Bragg, though not so bad. They both plan too

much—only Bragg don't hardly ever do anything else but plan. Rosecrans is all right—too careful, I'd say. When I come to think of it, they got better chances 'n we have. They didn't have any chance at all ten days ago. Now if anything they've got a little edge in the lay of the land. We'll have the creek at our backs, and they'll have Missionary Ridge."

To the eastward the whistle of a locomotive wailed long and mournfully.

"I've been listening for that," said Forrest, "and thank the good Lord now I've heard it. That's food and ammunition from Atlanta. It woulda been 'Katie, bar the door!' if them trains had got wrecked."

"It's amazing what an army uses up," said Stewart.

"Amazing!" snorted Forrest. "It's horrifying. Where I was raised in Middle Tennessee we learned that waste was the work of the devil and I still believe it. Our Scotch-Irish grandpappies taught it and I still think it's so. War has to do a mighty lot o' good to pay for what it costs. Why, if we'd win this war next week we'd be wrecked anyhow, for years to come. We wouldn't have many of our slaves any more. Half of our horses would be dead and the rest just about starved. I don't know how many of our houses have been burned or how many of our men have been killed or wounded, but it tears me up to think about it."

"I never heard you talk this way, General Forrest," said Cleburne.

"It's been backing up in me for a long time, and it's as good a time as any for it to bust out. We've had too much Bragg in this army——"

"He's not the only one."

"—and too many others a lot like him. It's been backing up in me since we lost Fort Donelson when we shouldn't have." He paused a moment and when he continued his voice was calmer. "Don't worry about me. I'm in this to stay. If we get whipped—and there isn't any need of it—I'll be the last man to surrender. Wait and see if I ain't."

The mournful wail of another engine rent the stillness of the night.

"The trains are getting here," said General Forrest. "At least there's somebody left on the Southern side that isn't teetotally paralyzed." He sat for a long minute in silence. Then he said, "I'm half a notion to start this battle myself. I bet old Rosecrans'll drop dead from surprise."

3

Corporal Syracuse Judd was hungry. It was his normal state. He was almost always hungry though sometimes more than others. The pangs hadn't been wholly quieted since the substance of the feast of Critter Company burgoo, ten days before, had long since been used up. Corporal Judd was from Georgetown, Kentucky, and, therefore, knew good food—and, therefore, required a great deal of it. But, being as God and Georgetown had made him, he ate all allotments with relish. Food was desperately scarce in the Army of Tennessee. Whole trains of it had been promised from Atlanta but it was slow coming. Meanwhile Corporal Judd's hunger struck deeper.

"What you reckon I had for supper?" he asked in tones surcharged with grievance. "A spoonful o' beef that was on the hoof when I was a baby. One runty potato which if it coulda been worse cooked they'da done it. And one other thing, though whether it was a biscuit or some sort of newfangled ammunition I ain't certain. When I remember what I used to eat at home ——" Emotion interrupted the flow of Corporal Judd's speech and gave Corporal Ed Wheeler of Davidson County, Tennessee, a chance to speak.

"Last night I dreamed about fried dried-apple pies, the kind Ma used to make back in Tennessee. You ever eat any fried dried-apple pies, Judd?"

"Lissen: you're no friend o' mine or you wouldn'ta brought 'em to my mind, the way I'm a-feelin'. Eat 'em? Did you ast did I ever eat 'em? I used to eat 'em mornin', noon and night, and if your mother had ever watched my mother make 'em you'd really have something to talk about. But them fried apple pies

ain't doing me no good now. The Hebrew Children was never one speck hungrier 'n I am."

"They got manna."

"You know I'm in a notion to go out and look for some. They didn't need no manna any worse 'n I do. They didn't get that manna just a-standin' still, did they?"

"I don't rightly recollect, but it don't sound reasonable that the Lord woulda fed 'em free. Where you figger on lookin' for it?"

"I never know before I start. Then everything just sort o' seems ree-vealed."

"I reckon I'm about ready," Wheeler said rising slowly to his full six-feet-three.

"You ain't one speck readier 'n I am."

They struck out by the path that ran north, its outlines revealed by a moon lifting above the sycamores that lined Chickamauga Creek.

"I remember one time Ma sent me ten fried dried-apple pies. We was soldierin' over aroun' Lebanon then, and Lieutenant Nichol who had been on a spyin' trip in Nashville brought 'em back to me. How long you think them ten pies lasted me?"

"Shet up. Where we're goin' there's Yankee pickets thicker 'n fleas on a spotted shoat, and if you say pies again I'm liable to scream and wake 'em up."

"You got any notion where you're a-goin'?"

"I'm a-goin' to foller right behind my nose. It's a-leadin' me and it's never misled me yet. Where it says there's manna, that's where manna's liable to be."

Eastward sounded the plaintive cry of a locomotive. "I guess that's the vittles special," said Judd. "We been hearin' about it, and I been listenin' for it. That means more beef left over from the Mexican War, and potatoes to be handled by the cooks that we garnisheed from the blacksmith shops. That whistle a-tootin' means the makings o' something else that'll be a lot more useful to the artillery than what us respectable soldiers call biscuits."

"I hope we don't get captured or anything," Wheeler said. "We got to be keerful. From what I hear you don't get fed even that well in them Yankee prisons."

There were no near-by noises except the stir and twitter of little night things and the casual silken rustle of falling leaves. From the distance in three directions sounded the continuous blur compounded of horses moving and stamping; of wheels rolling along rocky roads; of railroad cars bumping into one another; of the murmur of men marching.

"Once, over close to Decherd, I was out following my nose like this one night when I run smack on some Yankees settin' around a fire and a-cookin' the biggest goose I ever set my eyes on," said Judd. "They had most onrighteously taken that goose from some noble Southern patriot, and my temper boiled over like sometimes it does. I stepped up a few feet and yelled, 'The Fourteenth Kentucky, charge!' Then I scattered myself a little and made a lot o' noise like the Fourteenth Kentucky a-chargin'. Well, them goose stealers left the scene of their iniquity like the angel o' the Lord had done summoned 'em. If they ain't slowed down they're pretty far up in Canada by now. I hadn't ever heard o' the Fourteenth Kentucky before then, but them goose-stealin' Yankees acted like they had."

"But what about the goose?" asked Wheeler.

"Biggest goose I ever saw, and you might say it was just about done. Yes, I reckon you could say it was done. I never cared for goose too much back home. We had a lot o' things I liked better. I used to think turkeys and chickens was a lot better, but right now I ain't so sure. A chicken is more nourishin' for parties and picnics, but goosemeat is powerful strengthenin' for the underpinin', and for the upbuildin' of the grit and gumption. Well, sir, I got that goose out the kettle and took the Fourteenth Kentucky back where it was safe to give it goose rations."

"I like goose fine," affirmed Corporal Wheeler. "You didn't eat all of that goose, did you?"

"It was the biggest goose I ever saw, and maybe it needed about ten minutes more cookin', though I didn't stop to do it. Yes, I'm the only feller that laid a tooth to that goose but not all

at one time. You see I hid it. I had goose two days solid, and you might say I sort o' lost taste for goosemeat, but you'd go a long ways before you'd see as satisfied a soldier as I was then. I been restless some since, though."

"Your nose smell anything now?"

Corporal Judd whiffed the night air delicately. "That's strange. Don't smell a thing. Looks like one would, with he-man appytites thick as grasshoppers all over the north side o' Georgia."

"Keep on a-smellin'. It's plumb agin the law to be as hongry as I am."

"When we come to something and there's talkin' to be done, you just leave it to me. If it takes more 'n talkin', you try throwin' rocks. That's where you shine."

"I had more reppytation for tree climbin' back home than for rock throwin'. If we get in a tight place I'm liable to climb one."

They moved down a rutted path. Near the foot of the grade it seemed in the dim light to run out into nothingness. Then Judd who was walking ahead saw that below them was the dry bed of a spring branch and that the path really went on in the form of a log that spanned the branch. The log was fairly broad and the top side hewed to flatness. So they had no trouble walk-ing across. On the opposite side the path ran up the grade and leveled off at the top.

Suddenly Judd pulled Wheeler down to the ground and together they scrambled back from the path ten or twelve feet. They lay still, breathing in silence, for Wheeler had heard the steps too. The sounds, made by two soldiers, drew nearer. They could hear the creak of leather as it flapped against someone—a pistol was being withdrawn from its holster. Neither Judd nor Wheeler could see anything except two shadows. The men stopped where the path turned down toward the spring branch.

"This is far enough," said one. "Let's go back to the others." They turned and went back along the path and presently were beyond hearing.

"Yankee pickets," said Judd. "This ain't no time to make a noise. We've got to be keerful."

To the east of them the light suggested a clearing. "Let's try this direction. It might be safer."

"What's your nose say?"

"It ain't certain, but I think it says go this way a spell. Don't you make any more noise 'n a red Indian. They's a lot o' ears p'inted tonight."

The growth of trees and saplings thinned out until they came to a clearing. Judd led the way across the old field, roughened by ancient furrows. The tufts of grass had been burned to a crisp by the drought.

"Reckon you can find your way back to Bed Forrest?"

"I'm blood-kin to a cat," Judd affirmed proudly. "What I hope is Bed doesn't miss me. That would make it so he just natchelly couldn't go to sleep for thinkin' about it, and I don't want Bed to miss his sleep."

"Bed don't ever sleep none nohow and it ain't from botherin' about you. Me, I sorta like Bed. Remember them ten fried dried-apple pies Ma sent me I told you about. I give two of 'em to him. No, sir, he ain't never forgot it. 'Fried Pie' is what he's called me ever since.

"Wait a minute." Corporal Judd stood still and sniffed the air. "That's it," he said delightedly. "If that ain't a ham cookin' somewheres Bed Forrest's a Yankee."

"Seems like I do smell sumpin. Yes, sir, I do now. Where at you say it is?"

"Can't tell you that, but this I'll say: you're going in the right direction when the smell gets stronger and when it don't you ain't."

They moved ahead a few rods. "This ain't it," said Judd. "The smell's a-dyin' out."

They turned north, and before they had traveled a hundred feet Judd was on the scent again. "You got any good throwin' rocks?"

"Plenty," said Wheeler patting his pockets.

"Goin' to need 'em. I think it's Yankees."

"Better be keerful about the Fourteenth Kentucky. Might not work twicet."

Then they saw the fire. Over it a large kettle swung on a six-foot section of a two-year-old sapling resting on two wooden forks driven securely into the ground. They could see steam rising from the kettle. Ten men were gathered around watching the kettle with an eloquent intentness. The cooking was being done in a little neck of the field that reached back into scrub woods. Judd and Wheeler cut sharply to the left and entered the wooded space two hundred feet from the scene of the cooking. They edged carefully down the border until they stood concealed by the first line of trees not forty feet from the fire.

Judd held his lips close to Wheeler's ears. "That's good ham. Smells purty near as good as Scott County, Kentucky, ham. Where'd they get a ham like that down in Geowgy? How many throwin' rocks you got?"

"Plenty."

Corporal Judd got his pistol ready, but quickly straightened himself into rigid alertness. One of the men about the fire was speaking.

"Look and see what time it is, Carl."

Carl held his watch tilted so that the light of the fire was caught on its face. "A quarter to ten."

"We'll leave them two hams there till ten. Then, just as soon as they're cool enough to slice, we'll divide them into ten parts. I figger there'll be three pounds apiece."

"Where you get them hams, Pete?"

"Donated unknowingly to our great cause by a Reb family named Napier."

"Ham-stealingest soldier in the Yankee Army," said Carl admiringly, nodding in Pete's direction.

Corporal Syracuse Judd's cup of outrage overflowed. He boiled over. He touched Wheeler on the arm significantly. Wheeler's right arm answered. It cut a short and swift arc and Pete's ham-stealing prowess existed solely in the records, at least for the time being. Pete crumpled to the ground and lay in the similitude of one entirely dead. Wheeler's arm moved again. He uttered a low groan, "Missed," and felt accusingly of his throwing arm. The Yankees stood looking down at Pete uncom-

prehendingly, though two or three of them had their pistols in their hands. There was a heavy thud and Carl lay on the ground doubled in pain.

Wheeler stared in wonder. "I didn't throw that rock."

Judd knew that Wheeler hadn't thrown it, but at that moment he couldn't ponder the puzzle for he was thinking ahead to a possible dispute over the ownership of the hams. In his opinion that was the major matter. All the Yankees had their pistols out and their eyes were searching wildly for a target. Not finding one, they manifested uncertain signs of flight.

Wheeler threw again and the stone landed squarely in the stomach of a man who had shifted while it was in the air. He sat down grotesquely and struggled for breath. At the same moment another screamed, "My arm's broke!"

This marked the end of the enemy's irresolution. They ran for their lives, leaving their wounded lying or sitting on the ground. They fled eastward, away from the spur of woods where the two corporals were concealed. One ran close to the wooded line opposite. Suddenly he grabbed his jaw, yelling lustily, "I been snake-bit! I been snake-bit! I been snake-bit! I heard it hiss."

Judd and Wheeler heard the retreating soldiers pound frantically across the drought-hardened field, climb hurriedly but clumsily over the rail fence. They emerged from the shadows and walked warily toward the fire. Judd held his pistol in readiness, and Wheeler's fingers curved lovingly around a time-rounded limestone rock the size of a large egg.

At the same moment the driver and College Grove moved out into the open space on the opposite side. College Grove too was armed with throwing rocks, and the driver's whip was poised for action. One of the men on the ground still lay motionless. Two others turned and twisted, groaning lustily all the time. The fourth sat with his head bowed on his knees, half sobbing, half groaning.

"You fellers Rebs?" called out the driver.

"Same as Bed Forrest," said Judd. "What you?"

"Same as Frank Cheatham," answered the driver. "Keep your shootin' weepin handy. I'm a-goin' to git theirs." He made the round of the four men and took their pistols. Judd stood over the three who were conscious and held his pistol menacingly but they offered no resistance.

"We better git them hams and hot foot it away from here," said the driver. "This ain't no time to stand aroun'. You can't tell, might sumpin happen."

"Mister, who're you?" asked Judd. "You wantin' a slice o' our hams?"

"That's a p'int that better be settled closer home. I done told you this place ain't safe. I ain't a-hankerin' to stay here no longer 'n I have to."

With a surprising show of strength he lifted one end of the heavy sapling out of the fork and placed it on the ground. The kettle slid down until it rested at the edge of the fire. The driver went to the other end of the sapling and expertly lifted it so that the boiling water poured from the heavy kettle. Expertly he poked first one ham and then the other out to the side of the fire, using the piece of sapling.

"This ham's too hot to carry in our hands but we got to get away from here; too clost to more Yankees."

He took a knife from his pocket and went into the woods. They heard him cutting something. He came back with two limbs, each with a fork at its end and its short prong sharpened. Expertly he maneuvered this prong into the fleshy part of the ham's shank end. "You tote this," he said handing it to Judd.

The driver struck out across the field with the other ham, walking rapidly and holding the hot ham down at his side but with no contact to his leg. Judd followed, and the two members of the rock-throwing bodyguard brought up the rear. They climbed the rail fence, crossed another field, crossed a peach orchard and came out of it onto a flat spreading rock with a cleared place all about it. Judd was panting from the swiftness with which they had been walking and from the extra effort required to hold the hot ham clear of his legs.

The driver stopped and lowered his ham to the rock. "I reckon you been figgerin' on dee-vourin' this here ham," he said pleasantly.

"Who throwed the first rock? I ask you that," Judd asked with a touch of militancy.

"That ain't the p'int a-tall. You heard that Yankee say where he got them hams, didn't you?"

"I heard him, and I heard him say they aimed to eat 'em themselves."

"They aimed wrong. They dug 'em a pit and then they fell in it, as the Good Book says. Miz Napier lives down here about three miles. Her husband's off with the Rebs in Virginny. Ifn she'da had more 'n two hams, that rascally galoot woulda took 'em."

"And I'd been a-countin' a whole lot on a mess o' ham meat which I ain't et any of sence Heck was a pup," said College Grove rebukingly.

"I'm a-tellin' you sumpin else 'bout this Miz Napier. I showed Frank Cheatham the way to her house today. The ginral had picked her place to be the horspital. It's a purty big house and jes the right distance from where they think the battle's a-goin' to be fit. The ginral ain't never see the house, and him and me was app'inted to make the 'rangements. So I took him. She's a nice-lookin' woman and her house is mighty clean. 'Ma'am,' says Frank Cheatham, a-bowin' low and a-holdin' his hat in his han', 'I'm mighty sorry but we got to take your house.' 'For the wounded?' she asks very ca'm-like. 'I'm right glad you guessed it, ma'am.' 'When you a-wantin' it?' 'Jes as soon as the battle starts. We better git it ready tomorrer.' 'I'll be ready for you early in the mawnin.' 'Ma'am,' says the ginral bowin' agin, 'you is fit to be called a true Southern woman.' 'I'll be stayin',' she says. 'There is work I can do. Take anything here that you need. There is still some food. Go ahaid 'n use it.' Now all this was afore them onery galoots had stole her hams."

Corporal Judd sighed. "I'd been a-tastin' ham fer two miles, but I reckon ahmy rations is all I'm a-goin' to get."

College Grove said, "That Miz Napier'd never miss a little teeny slice. I'd make Frank Cheatham a better man ifn I had one—jes a teeny slice."

The driver looked at him sternly. "Ifn while we a-walkin' along a Yankee cannon ball comes along and takes a leg offn you, I'll slice you a piece. Ifn that don't happen we ain't a-slicin' that ham."

"Shucks, it's all right with me," said Wheeler. "I don't expect it's a good thing to fight a battle on a heavy stummick."

"How'd you happen to miss that Yankee?" asked College Grove. "I coulda hit him with one eye shet."

"Mister," said Wheeler solemnly, "I'll lay you two bits one throw, three or five. Now you shell out some money or stop makin' so much noise."

"This here's a moral army," said Judd. "No gamblin' on wicked things like rock throwin'. How'd you all happen to be there, anyhow? You coulda knocked me over with a day-old feather."

"We fed the hosses and took a little walk," the driver informed him. "We all a-goin' to take these hams back to Miz Napier who they belong to."

"They shore smell mighty purty, but I reckon I'd ruther be a patriot than be full." College Grove's tones were rich in resignation.

"Preacher Dewitt's wife is a-staying with Miz Napier. Frank Cheatham was right glad to see Miz Dewitt. They knowed each other back in Nashville. Corporal, you grab a ham. It's done time to be a-goin'."

An hour later the driver hollered "Hello" at the Napiers' front gate. An interval of silence passed. Then they heard bare feet strike the floor. A pale light showed in one of the rooms. After a little the door to the front porch opened and Mrs. Napier came out carrying a lantern. "Who is it?"

"Ma'am," answered the driver, "it's me. Don't you ricollect? I was here with Frank—I mean Ginral—Cheatham about four o'clock this evenin'."

"Oh, yes, you're ready for the house?"

"No, ma'am, not yet. There's some fellers with me and we brung your hams back."

"Hams? Brought them back? What hams?"

"Yes, ma'am, some wicked Yankees stole 'em and cooked 'em. But good ham meat ain't fitten vittles for Yankees. So we brung 'em back."

"Wait a minute." She ran down the steps into the back yard and out to the smokehouse. She came back, shaking her head ruefully. "They're gone, but I don't see how anybody got them without my knowing it."

"I expect the Yankees better at ham stealin' than at ham cookin', but I reckon you know how to doctor them up, sort o' take the Yankee out o' them, you know. They won't keep long, so you'll have to eat fast."

"I guess I'll have plenty of help eating them. They may come in handy right soon."

"We better be goin', ma'am. Tomorrer might be a right tirin' day. We wish you well, ma'am."

"Thank you, all of you. Say, can't you wait a minute? I've got something for you. There's a big watermelon in the springhouse. It looks like a good one."

"We wouldn't want to deprive you of it, ma'am."

"I want you to have it. We got a patch down by the spring and there's been a good many even though it's been mighty dry. I'm going to put two or three more in to cool first thing in the morning. I'll show you where it is."

She led them to the springhouse a hundred yards to the north, opened the door and flashed the lantern on a half-submerged watermelon, obviously in size and quality a credit to Georgia—in view of the drought, a pæan to the state.

The men carried the melon a mile before they found a suitable place for their feasting. The driver cut the melon into quarters, one for each man.

They ate long and with deep satisfaction. "Best watermelon I ever put in my mouth," said College Grove, but some deep loyalty laid a warning hand on him, "except back home at Col-

lege Grove. Yes," he continued, having gained a clearer view, a full perspective, "they got watermelons back home that's a lot bigger, but I never wanted one half as bad as I did this."

"Never heard of College Grove," said Corporal Judd, "never heard of it. I reckon it's possible they raise watermelons there, but the chances is they're runts. But now, you take Georgetown, Kentucky. Why, once my daddy raised a watermelon—oh, well." He stopped, overcome by emotion.

"Well, what about it that makes you talk so big?" prompted College Grove. "Besides, I ain't never heard o' Georgetown, Kentucky. Must be some little teeny mudhole of a place."

Corporal Judd managed to reply, "I'm not lying to you. That's something I wouldn't do, though there is folks that will. That really was a watermelon. It got bigger and bigger. Ever' day it got bigger. A tree got in its way and it pushed it over like it was a piece o' straw. One morning my father come to the house and he really was scared; only time I ever saw him scared in my life. That melon was so big the field was giving way. It was sinking jes about a foot an hour, he said. And that was the best field he had and he couldn't afford to lose it. If that field got sunk it'd go hard with him."

"What happened?"

"Luckiest thing I ever heard of. There was a Baptist Association goin' on at Georgetown that day, and there was seven hundred and forty Baptist preachers there, and they all come and helped roll that watermelon off in time to save the field."

"What happened to the field they rolled it on?" College Grove clothed his inquiry with a subtle sneer.

"Oh, nothing. Them Baptist preachers saw what might happen, so they helped out by eatin' the watermelon—that is, all they could hold."

The driver was humming a big of doggerel from his native hills:

"Davy Crockett was a man who was willin' to try,
But he never could learn how to tell a lie."

4

Hume Crockett left Mrs. Whitesides' early in the morning. She would, she told him, be leaving within an hour. She didn't believe she'd have much trouble getting out of Chattanooga.

"The Yankees aren't curious about womenfolks; they don't pay us much mind," she said.

Her people weren't far away. She could reach them in three days. She wasn't worried. She'd leave the house locked, though that wouldn't do much good if the Yankees really wanted to get in. All she desired was a place for the family to come to when the war was over.

Crockett left the house with very little notion of what lay ahead of him. He had been assured that Nichol was safe. Of course safety under the prevailing conditions could well be a short-lived matter, but the mission on which General Forrest had sent him involved no concern for Nichol except in case of immediate peril. They had been sent to Chattanooga to discover what they could of the enemy's plans. It interested General Forrest little whether they gathered their information separately or together. The sergeant by now had almost surely reached the general. The general most likely would not send Goforth back into town. Crockett had the impression that no major strategy was in formation, that all current movements of troops did no more than answer the day's expedencies. Likely Nichol too had already rejoined General Forrest. Nichol was a resourceful man, and particularly so when an emergency arose suddenly. If he had decided to go back to Forrest he was in all probability already there. Crockett was sure that he'd better be going soon himself.

He would reconnoiter a bit about the city and if nothing important demanded his attention he'd be on his way. His pass was more than a month old, but he couldn't go to General Rosecrans' headquarters for another, not now. They'd be too inquisitive there.

He doubted if there would be very sharp scrutiny of Union soldiers outward bound. There were too many of them. He'd

see what he could and then he'd decide what step to take next.

Again, very few people were on the street. The heat promised to be as intolerable as it had been for a fortnight straight. The leaves, such as remained on the trees along the street, were withered and shriveled, and when they fell on the street were soon pulverized into dust. The bricks of the sidewalk were not hot to the touch yet, but they would be by noon. Even now chickens in the yards he passed lolled panting under whatever shade they could find. Zinnias were favorite flowers in Chattanooga, but the plants had all perished from thirst. Crockett saw a pan of water put out in a side yard for the chickens. They crowded about it, and in and out among the chickens fluttered and hopped a dozen birds—jays, cardinals, sparrows, their timidity lost in thirst. The sky was cloudless and there was a coppery glint in the purplish haze that clung to the mountains.

As Crockett passed a corner the whistle of a railroad engine blew in the train yards below him. He could see intense activity there—wagons standing at the side of boxcars, other wagons waiting their turn, engines whistling, backing, clanking all over the yards. He considered the possibility of a ride in one of the wagons out somewhere within walking distance of General Forrest. It might be done. He remembered that Goforth had mentioned it. The notion was worth keeping in mind.

He moved on down the street toward the station. Soon he was passing the Crutchfield House. It was doubtless pleasant in the waiting room. He had found it so on the two or three times he had been inside the hotel. He turned in at the door. The waiting room was hot too, but the sun could not reach it. He climbed the stairs to the promenade gallery and found a vacant seat near the banisters. He sank into it. Its cushions were soft and restful. From it he had a clear view of most of the waiting room below, and of the hotel entrance. Not many, eight or ten, all soldiers, were in the waiting room and on the gallery. Fifteen feet from him a soldier, his feet resting on the banister railing, slept soundly and audibly. Crockett had no intention of dropping off to sleep himself, but he did. He was awakened some thirty minutes later by voices near by. Something that General

Forrest had once told him flashed across his memory: "In this business you listen to everything you have a chance to. As a matter of fact a lot of times you go out of the way to listen. You can't tell when you'll hear something you'd give your eyeteeth to know."

It wasn't that he expected to hear something this time he'd give his eyeteeth to know. It was sort of a game. No movement betrayed his return to consciousness. His breathing was level and long-drawn-out, as with one greatly fatigued. The voices of the two as he listened rose to the level of intelligibility.

One was saying, "I wouldn't mind a battle much. It might get my mind off this weather."

"Well, I'd mind it. It would get my mind on the weather. I saw Whitaker at breakfast and he's in a fidget."

"Too hot to get in a fidget. Whit gets into one right easy. What's the matter with him this time?"

"Reb spies. He's got them on his mind. He dreams about them. He sees them in his sleep. Says one of them played him a mean trick on Walden's Ridge; then he says he played it back on the Reb here in Chattanooga. Whit's got a funny sense of humor. He found the fellow asleep in a church and might have captured him with no trouble at all. But Whit had that joke on his mind and he played it. He aimed to even the score and then capture him later."

"Did he?"

"No, and that's the reason for his fidgets. Yesterday afternoon he got word the spy was leaving on a horse. So Whit got him a horse and went after him. He caught up with the Reb somewhere going up the hill. And what do you think?"

"Go ahead. I'm too hot to think."

"The Reb outtalked him. Rebs are talking people. This one made Whit think he was General Halleck or somebody. So Whit turned his horse around and started back to town. He said he hadn't got a half mile when he knew that he had had the worse bunkoing of his long life. He rode back as fast as his horse could take him but the spy had gone."

"Well, at any rate he's not here in Chattanooga. It ought to be worth something to know that. Let him go on out to Rossville and outtalk old Rosey."

"But there are two more of them here. They hunt in threes, it seems. Whit's so mad because this feller outsmarted him he's bound to catch the others. He's hot on their trail. I'd hate to be in their place when he does catch them."

"Jail couldn't be any hotter than this."

"To hear Whit talk he won't put them in jail. He'll drag them through town with a horse, or something like that. Then he'll draw and quarter them. Whit's mighty fidgety today."

"I'm mighty fidgety too, and it's not Reb spies that are causing it. If I was in charge of this war like old Rosey, I'd call it off till after the first killing frost."

"Rain would make more sense than frost. Whit's sure enough got his dander up. A spy will have a poor chance to get out of Chattanooga today, and he'll have a poor chance to stay here."

"It'd take two feet of snow to cure me of the fidgets I got. I say it's too hot to bother about Reb spies. But I hope Whit gets his."

"As smart as Whit works—that is, except when he lets one of them outtalk him—it oughtn't to be too much trouble for him to get them. The town is so empty now one would stand out like a sore thumb."

A clock tolled somewhere. The officer so distressed by the heat stood suddenly.

"Heavens, I had no idea time had gone by like that! I'll be late for an appointment with Napoleon Bonaparte." He left hurriedly. The other smiled appreciatively. Obviously the reference to Napoleon was a joke of some standing. After a while he hitched up his belt and went down the stairs. Crockett saw him cross the waiting room and go out to the street.

So leaving Chattanooga was not to be easy after all! Yet he had to leave. He would not serve General Forrest by remaining longer. Also Nichol was back with General Forrest. So was Goforth. It would be a risky matter trying to get out of town, but,

one way or another, it would be over soon. In Chattanooga the risk would always be present, never letting up day or night, never a moment of relief from fear.

He didn't know just where Forrest was. He must be somewhere east, or more likely southeast, of the city. That was the direction Crockett would strike for. For a moment his brow puckered in thought. The exits would be guarded. He would have to assume the identity of a soldier who belonged to a duly organized unit. Well, there was nothing to gain by waiting. A quick move and a bold one would be his program. He started to rise from his chair, but at that moment he saw an officer coming into the waiting room.

A lieutenant straightened himself to his full height and said, "Good morning, Captain Whitaker."

Whitaker responded but did not stop. He moved across the waiting room and started up the stairs at the right. Crockett walked quickly to the opposite stairs and down them. He went rapidly through the waiting room and out the door, though affecting a casualness in his progress. His first thought was to seek a brief refuge in the railroad depot, but sentries paced in front of it. He turned up the hill on Cherry Street. At the crossing ahead at Cherry and Eighth he saw another sentry with musket on shoulder. He slowed his walk till the sentry's face was turned. Then he darted into a store. It proved to be a grocery. He asked for half a pound of cheese. He went back to the street and turned again toward the Crutchfield House. But he had no idea of going back to it. He saw a soldier turn into an alley, apparently seeking a short cut to Market Street. He entered the alley and followed the soldier through to Market. The soldier crossed the street, but Crockett again turned back up the hill. A few soldiers and a few civilians were on the street. Steam engines over in the railroad yards whistled sharply and there was the harsh bumping of freight cars.

Crockett saw something at the corner that made his heart beat faster. A sentry appeared from nowhere and stopped a soldier, questioning him intently. Crockett knew he had to get

through the cordon. He stopped as though to watch two scrawny dogs that were fighting listlessly in a yard. Another soldier came along, stopped and watched too.

"Which one would you take to be the Northern army?" Crockett asked him.

"That one." The soldier pointed to the larger dog.

"I guess you're right. It looks more like us," Crockett agreed. Somewhere a bugle sounded.

The soldier started. "I must have wasted a lot of time. This is the second dog fight I've seen today. They're mighty exciting. They get my mind off things. That bugle was for early rations, and I haven't finished—say, how far out this way are you going?"

"Oh, about a mile. Any help I can give you?"

"Yes, there is. There's been some change in arrangements. Could you tell that sentinel yonder and the one ten squares on out the street not to expect relief till four o'clock? One o'clock is when they were expecting it, but the provost guard is short-handed today, so they'll have to stay on. Only way to get grub here is to be on time. Much obliged."

"Wait a minute," said Crockett. "I'll be glad to tell the fellows but who is the order from? I'm new here."

"From Captain Clift of the guard."

"All right, I'm going that way anyhow. I'll deliver your message."

"Much obliged, pardner. You've kept me from dying of starvation."

The first sentinel grumbled and said that the next time he'd join the Reb Army since the work was lighter. The second accepted the order in sullen silence. Crockett walked on past him. The baffled feeling remained. He was in the outskirts of Chattanooga, but he was still in the guarded area. Surely not all this effort was to capture him. Obviously the Yankees had a more substantial concern than he could cause them. Or were these circles of guards about the town commissioned as much to keep enemies out as to keep them in?

He had turned to the right and was walking along a rocky



lane so little used that the clay of its base had not been ground into dust. It was in places a tangled mass of briars and undergrowth.

Crockett's alert eyes caught sight of something a little distance ahead of him which brought him to a quick stop, followed by a sidewise jump into the scrubby undergrowth. Then, cautiously, he moved his head so that he could see down the lane again. The situation had not changed. The four Yankees were standing just as they had been thirty seconds before. They had not seen him. But they would see him if he got back into the lane. He was thankful for the quickness of his eyes. A fraction of a second had almost surely stood between him and capture. And now what should he do?

While he debated his course he heard soldiers coming along the lane toward him. If he could hide so that they would not see him, the way would be open to freedom. He snuggled close to the ground and pulled some tufts of shrubbery out in front of him. The soldiers went by with clumping tread and caught no sight of the man lying within ten feet of them. But instead of four there were only two of them. This meant that two were still between him and a free exit from Chattanooga.

He waited until enough time had elapsed for the soldiers who had passed to reach the street. He peeped out again. There was no sight of the others. He listened but heard no sound. Was it a trick to get him between the two parts of the enemy? He'd have to risk it. He couldn't stay where he was.

He got back into the lane and continued on it, making as little noise as was possible. His eyes ranged ahead for movement or a flash of blue color. There was nothing. He reached and passed the spot at which he had seen the enemy. There was no one there, so he went on out the lane, but his nerves were taut and his right hand never left its nearness to his pistol. He had no notion of permitting himself to be captured, or even detained for long.

Then he saw them. They moved out into the road just ahead of him, stood there blocking the entire way. It was too late to

run for it. As for his pistol, he might use it on one, but the other would have time to bring his musket into action. Crockett would have to bluff it through.

"Good morning," he said wondering vaguely if it was still morning."

"Sorry, Captain," said the leader. "Our orders are to require identification of all."

Crockett wished desperately that he had rehearsed another identity. If he gave a name at random further inquiry would reveal some inconsistency. He would brazen it out with the old one. "Captain Bronson Curry."

"Of what command, Captain Curry?"

"Of General Grant's staff. Sent from Vicksburg with messages for General Rosecrans."

"Have you delivered your message?"

"Several days ago."

"Then where are you going? My orders, Captain Curry, are very explicit."

Here was no common soldier. He must hold that in mind. "There's no point in my returning to General Grant. He's probably on his way here now. I fancy his message had something to do with coming here."

"Then where are you going?"

"I've heard there's to be a battle. I don't want to stay cooped up here while it is going on. I've been in Chattanooga too long already."

"Do you have a pass?"

"Only my pass from General Grant. I didn't know it would be necessary to get another."

A look appeared on the soldier's face that struck a pang of terror to Crockett's heart. "Three days ago," he said sternly, "we were asked to be specially on guard against two spies claiming to be messengers from General Grant. We were given important orders this morning, so important that for a moment I had forgotten about the spies. I'm sorry, but you'll have to go back to headquarters with us, Captain. If you can prove your statement,

and I suppose you can, you'll be released immediately. We have our orders. We have no course but to obey them. Please turn around and march a little ahead of us."

Crockett shrugged. He knew that he'd have to do something before he reached the end of the lane. It surely would be too late after that. It might be too late already.

"I'm sorry, Captain, to have to do this," said the sergeant soberly. "I'm sure you'll understand that I'm acting under orders."

"Of course, of course," said Crockett cheerfully. "It's part of a soldier's life. I'll convince you of your error at headquarters. Shall I start now?"

"Please do so, Captain. Stay close to him, Bill, and keep your gun ready."

Crockett started down the lane toward town. Bill, a burly, stolid fellow, was menacingly close behind, the other a few feet back of Bill.

"A little unusual to treat officers this way, isn't it, Sergeant?"

"A little," said the sergeant, "but it would make no difference if you claimed to be a general."

"If I prove myself, would it be possible to arrange for me to ride out in a wagon? I had no idea it was as hot as this when I started."

"I imagine it could be arranged."

"Better not watch me exclusively. There are other things to look out for. Twice I heard a snake as I came along. Shady places are filled with them now. Better watch out for snakes."

"What kind o' snakes?" asked Bill.

"Rattlers probably. This is rattler country, and there are a lot of copperheads too. It's been so dry on the ridges they've been crawling down to the bottoms by hundreds. Snakes scare me worse than anything."

"Me too. I'm afraid of them than poison."

"I heard in Chattanooga that a lot o' soldiers have been bitten down on the Chickamauga. They say the snakes are worse than the Rebs."

"That's right," said Bill. "I don't want to see no snake!"

They took a dozen steps in silence. Suddenly Crockett yelled, "Snake!" and pointed to a deep rut in the lane just ahead. He jumped backward, crashing into Bill with jarring force. Crockett's right fist struck Bill's jaw like a crowbar, and at the same instant his left hand grasped the barrel of the musket and jerked it away. Bill went down and out. Crockett ducked under the bullet from the sergeant's pistol. As he rose, he brought the musket barrel down violently on the sergeant's head. The sergeant, too, lost interest in the situation.

Both of the men on the ground were supplied with leather straps—an ominous reminder. With these Crockett, working rapidly, bound their wrists and ankles securely. He didn't have time to gag them, but, barring accidents, they'd be a long while making themselves heard. He took both pistols and Bill's musket and set off down the lane. The load was too heavy, so two hundred feet away he tossed Bill's gun and pistol deep into the shrubbery. The other pistol he kept.

He walked swiftly along. The lane reached bottom in the bed of a dry spring branch. Then it ran upward until presently it disappeared altogether on a cedar-lined hillside. He climbed the hill, crossed its summit and started down the eastern slope. He didn't pause on the ridge because visibility was too great. He stopped on a shelf a few hundred feet below the crest to rest, for the ascent had been long, tedious and tiring.

He sat on a great rock and rested. A panorama stretched out to the east and southeast. To the west and south the view was blocked by mountains. Everywhere in the distance hung thick clouds of grayish-white dust. To the right it was raised by marching Northern armies; to the left by the armies of Forrest, Cheatham, Walker, Cleburne, Polk and D. H. Hill. Far back of the dust clouds, far to the southward, he heard the muted thunder of a cannon. For long seconds its broken rumbling beat against hills and mountainsides only to be turned back to beat against other hills and mountainsides and then to die away. His eyes searched the horizon for a faint smudge of smoke but found none. The cannon was too far away or else blanketed

by those low-lying clouds. While he watched a voice behind him said sharply.

"Get your hands up! Quick, I mean!"

Crockett had thought he had circumvented his danger, but he was tired. The day was hot and the ridge had been long and rough. That voice drained all resistance out of him. He held his hands up without troubling to look around. Of course it was one of Whitaker's men who had followed him through the lane and up the dreary cedar hill. He had tasted freedom, but the Yankee had outwitted him. A sort of numbness afflicted his body and mind. He slid down to the ground.

"Get up!" said the voice behind him. It was an odd voice. It didn't sound like a Yankee. "Get up!" it said again. "It's a long way into camp and Bed Forrest'll be wanting a confab with you."

Hume Crockett jumped nimbly to his feet, poised to whirl about.

"Easy, Bud, easy! When I got to shoot I shoot."

"If you shot this time Bed'd hang you two miles higher than Haman. Get your finger off that trigger, Jim Cooper."

"How'd you know my name? Say, turn around here. Why, Hume Crockett! Durned if you ain't got so you look like a Yankee spy. Bed's liable to hang you just on looks. I sure would. What you doing skedaddling up that cedar ridge just like the red Indians were after you?"

"I've been in Chattanooga on business for Bed. The Yankees hated for me to leave so I had to outskedaddle them. But I kept thinking I might run across you or some other noble patriot. You come out to meet me?"

"You might call it that, but it wasn't exactly what Bed said. It's ten miles out to where Bed is, and ten miles is no child's play as hot as it is."

Lieutenant Beasley Nichol rode away from his meeting by the creekside with Captain Ralph Whitaker. He rode up the long

hill at an easy canter. The horse which had been furnished him was a good one but it was a hard day on horseflesh. No sense in punishing a good one. Good horses were becoming distressingly scarce in General Forrest's army, whose pride during the first two years of the war had been in its horses. Now the addition of a good one had become a minor victory. Nichol thought of the winter ahead, and his soul was uneasy. If the cornfields over any great part of the South were as barren as those he had seen, there would be short rations for both man and horse. Without corn, hogs remained runty and undernourished. When they were fed on corn they flourished and provided the Southern armies with their major ration. The soldiers had a way of saying that the army marched on hog meat. Also nothing matched corn in the endurance and efficiency it gave to horses.

Nichol caught up with and passed another string of wagons, stopped to rest the teams. Some of the teamsters waved to him as he cantered by, and he waved back.

His plan was to get to General Forrest with reasonable promptness. The general likely had some new assignment awaiting him. Not once had his return failed to draw a new one, and usually a surprising one. General Forrest was fertile in assignments. Nichol was not concerned with the prospect of any considerable difficulty to be encountered in rejoining his command. Doubtless the most delicate part of his return lay in his approach to his own lines. He would have to watch out for some nervous trigger fingers. . . . His thoughts moved back to Hunter Cragwall. How lovely she was!

He rounded a sharp curve in the road and saw two blue-uniformed officers sitting on horseback at the side of the road. One of them raised a restraining hand. Nichol drew his horse to a stop. What was up now?

"We were waiting for you, Lieutenant," the man said.

"Yes," replied Nichol, struggling for inspiration, "yes, indeed."

"General Rosecrans instructed us to bring you to his headquarters. I'm Lieutenant Sturgis. Let me present my comrade, Lieutenant Couch. We're on General Rosecrans' staff. We've heard

much of you, Lieutenant Ligon. All of it very favorable."

Lieutenant Ligon! So he was Lieutenant Ligon. And who could Lieutenant Ligon be? What did General Rosecrans expect of Lieutenant Ligon? Well, he'd been in tight places before. This was just another one.

He bowed and smiled gravely to Lieutenant Couch. He bowed in appreciation to Lieutenant Sturgis. He had no objection to a visit to General Rosecrans. In fact, ordinarily such a visit would please General Forrest very much. It was a sort of fraternizing after Forrest's own heart. The possibility of involvement with Captain Ralph Whitaker occurred to Nichol but he discarded it. Whitaker would not likely find himself in position to disillusion General Rosecrans as to the identity of Lieutenant Ligon. He asked casually, "General Rosecrans' headquarters near?"

"Not far. I would have recognized you anywhere, Lieutenant Ligon."

"Really," said Nichol startled, "you surprise me. I had no idea——"

"Oh, yes, that copy of *Leslie's Weekly* has had considerable use in our outfit. Most of us are familiar with it. Would you have known him, Couch?"

"Certainly. The sketch was excellent. Come from Cleveland today, Captain?"

Cleveland! Cleveland was forty miles away, but evidently it was expected of him. "Yes," he said, "I left early."

"What a horse!" said Couch. "From Cleveland on a day like this and barely panting."

"To tell you the truth, Lieutenant Ligon, we weren't expecting you before sundown," Lieutenant Sturgis said. "We were prepared for quite a wait."

"Glad to get here this early. Any new developments? What about the Rebels?"

"They seem to be moving their entire force from the general direction of Lafayette. We're moving ours straight north from as far south as Alpine. In our hurry to get into the South we got too far south. Now we're having to retrace, and with the weather as it is, that's difficult."

"I presume the lines of movement of the two armies tend to converge."

"Precisely, and sooner or later they will meet. A collision seems inevitable. Tomorrow perhaps or the day after. Almost certainly no longer than three days from now."

"Are we ready for it?"

"No, if I'm any judge, we're not. We've had time to choose the best of positions, but I'm not at all sure ours will prove the best."

"One trouble," Lieutenant Sturgis said, "is that we've had to watch the Rebels like hawks. They haven't made an orthodox move yet. They do nothing that we can reasonably expect of them. They do the oddest things."

"I hear they think the same of us," said Nichol.

They rode by a long line of wagons. Nichol caught a glimpse within one. Ammunition! Now they were riding through an encampment. Tents, hundreds of tents, were on both sides of the road. Nichol noted that they were almost deserted. Back in the woods he heard sounds that might have been made by a thousand axes wielded furiously. Evidently they were trying to regain time wasted in watching the unpredictable Rebels.

"Tell me, Lieutenant, just what made General Rosecrans believe I could be of special service to him."

"Lieutenant Ligon's service in Virginia is well known. We are in need of similar help here."

"I wasn't told the details."

"The same need experienced by General McClellan and supplied so well by you."

"It will have to be done tomorrow if at all," added Lieutenant Couch. "That's about our last chance."

"Tomorrow? Yes, that will be all right. I'll be ready then. Are any special difficulties involved?"

"The dust," said Lieutenants Sturgis and Couch in one voice. "It's bad."

"That surely oughtn't be insuperable. I've become quite used to it."

"I thought you'd say that, sir," said Sturgis admiringly. "But

as a matter of fact the dust has been most confusing to both armies, I imagine."

They were halted by a sentry, and Nichol knew that they were approaching General Rosecrans' headquarters. Sturgis presented his credentials and the man waved them by. They rode through a heavy grove of scrub timber and then out into a clearing planted in young grapevines. On the far side stood a plain farmhouse, and in the rear of it a barn.

Beasley Nichol had faced emergencies before, but this was a brand-new one and heavily laden with peril. He had considered flight all the way from his involuntary rendezvous with the two officers. He might have made his way to freedom, but the odds were against it once their suspicion was aroused, once he made the break to escape. His thoughts were always sharpest in a crisis. General Forrest would want to know of any special or unique plan which the enemy might be forming. He'd take his chances. He'd see the thing through.

There was a hitching rack behind the house and the three rode to it.

"The general's horse is gone," said Sturgis. "I thought he was to be here."

"He might be but if he isn't he'll be back before long," said Couch. "He didn't expect us as early as this."

They went toward the house, familiarly greeting the guard by the door.

"He's not here," said the guard. "He said he'd be back in two hours."

"Then I'm sure it will be all right for Lieutenant Ligon to wait inside. He must be tired. We'll go to our tent until the general sends for us. Best of luck, Lieutenant Ligon!"

The guard entered the house with Nichol and indicated a chair in the hall. Then he left. Nichol sat there for a while. The door to Rosecrans' office was open. General Forrest would expect me to look inside the general's office, he thought, smiling wryly. There was very little inside the room except several chairs and a table covered with papers. A great map hung on the wall. He could see the sentinel outside indifferently walking the length

of the front-yard fence. He wondered whether any of the papers on the disheveled desk carried reference to Lieutenant Ligon. If so it would be vastly helpful for him to know of it before General Rosecrans came back. His ability to invent might not be enough.

Nichol walked into General Rosecrans' office and up to the desk. On the very top paper his eye caught the name Lieutenant Joshua Ligon. He took it and went out into the hall. Safer to read it there. His eyes popped out. It was an official communication to General Halleck, thanking him for the assignment of Ligon to his command. Rosecrans found the terrain confusing and confessed ignorance of the whereabouts of a considerable part of the enemy forces. A major battle seemed inevitable. The help of an expert cartographer like Ligon would add greatly to the army's effectiveness.

A balloon had been secured. Two officers would make the ascent with Lieutenant Ligon, one an experienced observer, the other trained in map making. Ligon's assistance in a similar venture in Virginia was proof of his aptness for the assignment.

An ascent in a balloon! All right, he'd make it. But he couldn't draw a map. Well, he'd draw something. General Rosecrans should have something. He'd try to make him think it was a map.

The sentinel was peering out toward the road. Nichol looked too. Three horsemen galloped toward the house. One of them was Captain Ralph Whitaker! They were riding at breakneck speed. Nichol ran out the side door. As he jumped from the top step to the ground, the men threw themselves from their horses and called to the sentinel to take the reins. They dashed into the house as he leaped into the saddle. The horse was a noble brute and answered with a plunge. The men ran out the front door yelling to the guard.

Nichol saw that his way was blocked by a high fence at the back. He'd have to go out as he'd come in. He guided the horse to the right through a vineyard. The fence at its end was low and the horse took it at a bound. Nichol pulled to the right, around the barn toward the road. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the men already back on their horses, and the guard aim-

ing his gun. The explosion was muffled by the wind that rushed by his ears.

The sentry at the gate watched him openmouthed as he went through at a dead run. He heard the clatter of his pursuers fifty yards behind. He dashed between the long line of tents and noticed that the few soldiers who stood or lay on the ground regarded him curiously. He was gaining because his horse was fresher. He reached a fork in the road. The highway ran up a low hill, and the bypath dipped down into a thicket. He pulled to the right and took the bypath. A branch, dry except for stagnant pools, lay at the bottom. He cast caution aside and stopped his horse to drink. He heard the pounding of hoofs as his pursuers galloped on up the hill.

"Oh, ye'll tak the high road, and I'll tak the low road," he caroled very softly.

Then he was on his way again. He didn't know the country but he was sure the road would sooner or later lead him to the Southern armies. After that it would be easy to get to General Forrest. But of what lay in between he had little idea. Sometimes the road he traveled was vague and little-used, sometimes it showed intense use. He rode sometimes to the south, sometimes to the east, sometimes a little to the north. Once he waited breathlessly behind a clump of crimson sumac while a file of silent bluecoats rode by. He thanked God for sumac and for a horse that could be still when danger threatened.

6

At dark he rode into Bedford Forrest's headquarters. The general sat out front on a stump and toyed with the buckle of his spur which required adjustment. He looked up at Nichol, and his gaze moved on to Nichol's horse. He took up a dead stick and broke it with a sharp snap. "Nine lives, Lieutenant, were all you had to begin with and you usin' 'em up fast. That's a good hoss. Did you steal it from a Yankee when he wasn't lookin'?"

"I'll take good care of what lives I have left, General Forrest.

I don't know much about the horse, but it acts as though it had been a Southern horse to begin with. Maybe the Yankees had it awhile, but we've got it now."

"I like for a man to steal back. In fact, I train him to. It gives me a tickled feelin'. Crockett's back—that is, he was. But he has gone again. I had a fancy job waiting for him."

"Where's the sergeant?"

"He's off with Crockett. Did you hear about him?"

"No, General Forrest, I haven't heard a thing. What was there to hear?"

"He started back to us and on the way he stole from the Yankees more drugstore stuff than you ever saw and brought it with him. And he stole the Yankee that had it. Smartest trick I ever heard of, and mighty useful, too. We've been physicking this army ever since he got back. Now we got the wellest soldiers I ever saw. I think more of the sergeant all the time. Well, tell us what happened to you, Lieutenant."

Nichol told him.

"Jehosephat, Lieutenant, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! You've stopped the best show an army ever had. The boys are not goin' to like this, Lieutenant. We've known all about that shenanigan for two days and exactly where the balloon was a-goin' up. Now you've stopped it. I tell you, they're not goin' to like it. I'd hate to be in your shoes when they hear about it."

"But, General Forrest, I was to go up in it."

"That doesn't make any difference at all. The boys aren't goin' to like it, Lieutenant. We've got a soldier from Virginia, one that Pelham trained. He can take a good cannon and shoot the left hind leg off a yearling flea at a mile. And we've put a cannon right where it couldn't miss with this man that Pelham trained a-shootin' it. I tell you, Lieutenant, the boys are goin' to be as mad as hornets. You've spoiled a mighty good show."

7

A whole day passed and no one came to Hunter Cragwall for alteration of features or clothes; for rehearsal in posture, walk

or speech. Perhaps her work in Chattanooga was finished. Perhaps the time had come for her to move again.

She heard a gentle knock at the side door. She walked across the room and opened it. The Prophet stood there, his broad-brimmed hat in his hand, the late afternoon sun accenting the coal-blackness of his beard and the unnatural brightness of his eyes. He regarded her with unwavering eyes. "Howdy, missy," he said in his loud harsh voice. "I hope you walk in the favor of the Lawd. Have you got a crust o' bread for a servant of the true God?"

She held the door open. "Come in and I'll see," she answered smilingly.

He came into the house, still holding his broad, flopping hat in his hand. "Might be somebody listening," he said in explanation of the loudness of his voice at the door.

"Would a piece of blackberry pie do just as well as a dry crust of bread?"

"A crust of dry bread feeds the humbleness of the soul. Pie fills man with conceit and makes him biggoty. Mebbe I'm a-gittin' too humble. You sure you could spare me a piece o' pie, missy?"

She went out of the room and a few minutes later came back with an ample piece of blackberry pie and a cup of steaming hot coffee.

"Coffee!" he rumbled in great appreciation. "Ain't nothin' like good hot coffee to take the pizen out a hot day. Ain't much coffee no mo', missy." His enraptured glance moved on to the blackberry pie. "I musta been led here to be tempted. Fall down and worship me and I'll give you blackberry pie and hot coffee. No, missy, you ain't old Satan by a long sight but ifn you was you couldn'ta thought o' anything mo' temptiner than blackberry pie and hot coffee. But the flesh is weak. I yields."

She knew that his visit had more purpose in it than casual solicitation of food. She sat watching him while he ate with great heartiness. When he had finished he straightened to his great height. "Missy, it's time to go now. Time to be travelin' the highroad o' the Lawd. I mean you, missy."

"I've been expecting it. Go where?"

"Missy, I had some word today from Ginral Forrest. He wants to know, did you ever nuss any in times o' trouble and sickness?"

"Yes," she said, "yes, I have; not much but some."

"It's the work of the Lawd and as needed as rain in the Valley of Kedron or snow on the mountains of Lebanon or manna for the Hebrew Children. You been disguisin' people, a lot of people, missy. Reckon can you make yourself look like an old woman?"

"I suppose I could."

"Then look like one tomorrer mornin' about half past eight, and don't be late."

"Where am I to go?"

"Where there's terrible sufferin' that ought to be relieved and great affliction that ought to be healed, where one that follers the ways of the Lawd treads the paths of misery."

"What will you do?"

"Preach on the streets, proclaim the sins and iniquities of the world, circumvent the hosts of evil, chase ol' Satan as long as I can keep in sight o' him." He paused. Then he continued quietly: "Ginral Forrest sent me word what to do. I'll keep on preachin'—for a while."

"General Forrest sent you word about me?"

"Yes, missy."

"Will someone come for me?"

"Yes, there be them that will come. They will be drivin' but not in no chariot, and when they depart an old woman will go with them. That'll be you, missy."

He left and out on the street she could hear his voice, resonant but decreasing in volume as he walked rapidly down the street: "War on the mountain, war in the valley. Woe on them that cause war among my people! Saith the Lawd. . . ."

Promptly at half past eight the next morning she was ready and waiting. She was plainly the "old woman" that the Prophet

had had in mind. Her dress of drab gray was long, straight and faded. Her face was thin, wrinkled and gaunt, hidden in the depths of a gray sunbonnet. But to one conventional item of disguise she would not resort. She would not bear a pipe in her mouth.

In the ten or fifteen minutes while she sat waiting she heard the rattle of a light wagon on the stones of the street. Reiterated at frequent intervals was a fresh treble voice: "Bee-tree honey for sale! Fresh bee-tree honey! Come and git yore fresh bee-tree honey! Ain't no better bee-tree honey nowhere 'n this. Come and git hit."

She smiled. They've found another bee tree, she said to herself.

Presently the wagon reached the house and the younger of the boys came around to the side door and knocked. Hunter Cragwall answered.

"We got some mo' honey, ma'am."

"Come in, please."

He came hesitantly inside. "You ready to leave, ma'am?"

So this was the time and the way of her leaving. Very well, in war one left by the way provided. Halfway to the gate she spoke a word to the boy, turned and went back to the side porch. She took the key from its hiding place, opened the door and went into the house. When she returned she carried a package wrapped in an old newspaper. The boy looked at it but made no comment. She climbed onto the seat between the boys and they drove away.

"Sometimes Grandma goes with us," said Jim, the older boy, in explanation. "Folks has seen her."

At times his brother Willie cried out, "Bee-tree honey for sale!" But there was no indication that they were eager for trade or expected it.

The ramshackle wagon rattled southeastward along Market Street. Very few were abroad in that section of Chattanooga. Twice groups of soldiers passed them on the street, but they gave only perfunctory glances to the two boys and the old hill-woman on the wagon seat. There was no break in the heat, and

there were no clouds in the sky. No breath of air stirred. The thirsting trees stood in silent desolation.

The boys said nothing and presently stopped announcing their honey. They reached the outskirts unchallenged and began the ascent of a long rocky hill. After a while Hunter Cragwall broke the silence. "Where are we going?"

The older boy replied, "You're goin' where the Prophet said you would." After that silence for a long time except for the hoofbeats on the cobblestones and the rattle and creak of the wagon.

They came to a spring, a landmark in usual seasons but now dwindled to a dribble.

"We a-goin' to water the hoss and feed him some," said Jim. "You kin git a drink, too."

They alighted and the boys unhitched the gaunt horse. It drank long, rested, drank again. Jim got a tin cup from the wagon and handed it to Hunter. Willie fed the horse three ears of corn. Hunter Cragwall had a small package of food which she divided among the three of them. The boys protested that they didn't need it, but she noticed that they ate it eagerly.

As they were rehitching the horse she asked if they didn't miss the shoes they had sold the officer.

"Not much," said Jim. "Feet's tough."

"Not as tough as shoe leather. I got them back from the man you sold them to and I want to make you a present of them, a pair for each of you." She unwrapped the shoes.

The two boys looked at each other, then at Hunter, then at each other again. Willie signaled his brother with a look whose meaning was caught. "Much obleeged," Jim said. "Hit's come the time for us to be goin'. Climb in the wagon, ma'am."

They drove on up the hill. The gaunt horse never panted, never sweated, never changed gait and stopped only on command. Once Hunter suggested that it would ease the horse if they got down and walked awhile.

"He ain't tired." As far as appearance went the statement was correct.

The road ran out but neither horse nor boys seemed to take notice of it. They followed a rutted make-believe trail through scrub timber. And then they were bending southward through interminable scrub oaks and stunted pines. Their unchanging, unvarying movement forward made Hunter want to cry out and ask where they were going. But their destination and the route to it were according to the arrangement of the Prophet, perhaps of General Forrest himself. She would raise no question.

The country finally leveled out, and they came to a well-traveled road, deep in dust. It ran between stone fences which lined fields fertile but terribly stricken by drought. They came to a creek spanned by an arched stone bridge. The rocks of the creek bed were white in the afternoon sunlight. In its deep depressions was water fed by a meager flow.

Hunter noticed that the two boys were newly alert. They were getting close to an army, she thought, though whether friendly or hostile she could not guess. The road climbed a gentle hill and again they moved through scrub timber. The sun was falling fast toward the high western horizon, and as the evening approached its hard thrusts were blunted, and the rays filtering through the scattered leaves of the dwarfed trees became softer and friendlier. Deep in the woods, bobwhites were calling incessantly. They rounded a curve and a gray fox taking its ease by the roadside suddenly galloped frantically to the east. They climbed a little hill and came out onto its cleared summit.

Then Jim stopped the horse, not to rest but to listen. They could all hear it. A low murmur and rumble, a rattle and grind of wheels, hoofbeats of hundreds of horses, creak and strain of harness, men calling to horses, calling to one another, men singing—all these sounds melted into that fusion which is the authentic sound of a distant army marching.

They listened for a minute or two. "Three miles," said the older boy.

The younger shook his head. "Sounds further 'n that to me. Mebbe three and a half."

Hunter turned her head to look at Jim. He was staring straight ahead, his face impassive. It was almost as if he had known

exactly when and where he would hear an army marching, and how far away it would be. She asked him one question. "What army is that?"

The boy never looked around. "Ours," he said.

At sundown they came to a house. It was eight or nine hundred feet away when Hunter first saw it. A gate opened from the road into a little lane that climbed a gentle hill to it. Willie jumped down, trotted to the gate and unchained it, opened it and stood stiffly to one side while Jim drove the wagon through. The gate was rechaind and the younger climbed back to his seat on the wagon.

"Git up," said Jim, slapping the lines against the horse's croup.

Hunter Cragwall was as close to fear as she had ever been, and for no reason that she could frame into words. But she had faith in those who had sent her. What was it the Prophet had said? "Heal the sick, care for the distressed?"

Then she knew. It was a hospital, a field hospital for the battle they all thought inevitable. For a moment her throat was so tight that she choked. But it loosened. This was war; she had a part in it.

They stopped at the front gate. A woman came out of the house and down the path to the gate. Hunter could see that she was clean and that her seamed face was kindly. The two boys went to the gate and stood to await her coming. She patted their arms with restrained affection. The look on their faces was as near emotion as they were likely to show. The older boy said nothing. The other, less reticent, said, "Howdy, Grandma."

The woman gave him another pat. She turned to Hunter. "My name is Thedford. I live in this neighborhood. I suppose you're Miss Cragwall. I heard you was comin'. General Forrest sent us word that you was. Come in the house. We'll have supper right soon. I'm a-staying with Mrs. Napier till the battle's over. She's away right now but she'll be here before long. You boys take that horse around to the barn and feed it. There's a little corn and fodder there. Then you come in and wash up for supper."

Inside the house another woman sat sewing. "This is Mrs. Dewitt," said Mrs. Thedford. "Her husband is a preacher in the army." To Mrs. Dewitt she said, "And this is Miss Cragwall. She's the one General Forrest sent for, and he says she's a mighty fine woman. She's been a lot o' help to the army."

"Welcome," said Mrs. Dewitt. "I heard what General Forrest said——"

"And General Cheatham too," said Mrs. Thedford. "They both was here this evening. They said for us to go to bed early and get a good night's sleep tonight. We might not get another soon."

"My husband might come for a little while," Mrs. Dewitt said. "He will if he can. He's going to preach to the soldiers right after they eat their rations. He said the Yankees and our men are mighty close together, so close they could hear one another talk. He expects there will be fightin' tomorrow."

"Everybody expects it," Mrs. Thedford said.

"Then I must keep on working. I'm a little tired but if there is fightin' they'll be needing these bandages."

The two boys came in then from the back porch. Their faces were washed, their hair was wet and combed tightly against their heads. Jim held in his hands the package containing the shoes.

"We wanted these boys to come live with us," said Mrs. Thedford. "My husband and their two brothers is fightin' with General Lee. Their mother died a year ago. Their daddy's been dead five years. But they wouldn't come. They stayed on in the house in Chattanooga and hauled and sold things. And they helped the cause, too. General Forrest said they did. I'm proud of them." The boys said nothing but their eyes were brighter. "What you got wrapped in that paper?"

"Shoes, Grandma," said Willie, "shoes to wear."

"They're a present from a friend of mine," said Hunter.

"Isn't that fine! I hope you boys was polite. Let's see them."

The shoes were unwrapped. "Why, I never saw such fine shoes!" Mrs. Thedford exclaimed.

"Say, Grandma, ain't you got some socks we could have?" Willie asked timidly.

She prodded her memory with a puckered little frown. "Why, yes, I have. I was saving them for Christmas gifts. I'll get them early tomorrow. We got to eat supper now. I see Mrs. Napier coming."

Mrs. Napier came in. She was young and bright-eyed. Her movements were quick and energetic and her words were cheering. She greeted the newcomers heartily.

They ate their supper, a special supper, saved and scrimped by Mrs. Napier for the occasion. There was good ham. Hunter had not tasted good ham for a long time. Mrs. Napier saw Hunter eating it with obvious relish. "There's a funny story about that ham I'll tell you sometime," she said.

As the climax of the meal they went out on the back porch where there was fine watermelon, fresh from the springhouse. Mrs. Napier cut the melon with a large butcher knife and handed each a generous slice. "Eat it out in the yard so the chickens can get the seeds," she said. "They're not finding much to eat now. We eat the scraps ourselves that they used to get."

Mrs. Napier, Mrs. Thedford and Mrs. Dewitt washed the dishes and straightened things for the next day. The boys took their horse down to the spring branch for more water. The Napiers were blessed beyond most people of the section in that their spring still maintained a good flow.

Mrs. Napier and Mrs. Dewitt showed Hunter through the house. It was indeed ready for the purpose assigned it. Improvised cots were everywhere—in the rooms, in the halls—and the sheets were clean.

"General Forrest sent the sheets," Mrs. Napier said. "He sent them but we washed them."

There were tables wherever the cots left room for them, and on them were pans.

"I wanted you to see what we have," Mrs. Napier explained to Hunter. "Have you ever tended the sick?"

"Not much. A little at home. But you needn't worry. I can help."

"I dread tomorrow. God help me how I dread it! I don't guess I could stand it if you all weren't here with me. And the

boys—I need them here. I like them. Neither one of them was a week old when I first saw him. They're mighty sweet, but they've had a hard time."

"I've worked a lot with the sick," said Mrs. Dewitt. "None of my home people ever get sick, but there's been a lot of sickness in the congregation at Fayetteville, and we've helped a lot with it. But that wasn't like this, just sitting around and dreading things, thinking how awful it will be."

"It will be awful," said Mrs. Napier simply.

"I know. My husband has worked in field hospitals. He has told me about what happened in them. What do you want me to do when . . . when . . . ?"

"There'll be doctors here. We do what they tell us to. I'll go show the boys where to sleep. The room they generally sleep in is filled up. You all sit and talk for a while. It'll do you good. I'll be back directly."

9

Hunter Cragwall lay still, her eyes closed, courting sleep. But sleep would not come. She could hear the deep breathing of the two women and knew that they were sleeping. Once or twice a sort of delicious fogginess dimmed her consciousness. Then something far back in her mind would create the scream of the wounded, and she would awaken, wide-eyed and shivering. Deep into the night she lay awake. At last she could stand the bed no longer. She got up and sat at an open window, looking out on a quiet and peaceful world. The night was calm and very still. No armies were marching, at least none within her hearing. Some rifts of thin, white clouds were in the skies, silvered by a half-hidden moon. A little vagrant breeze stirred in a sort of half sigh before the window at which she sat. The taste of dust was no longer in her mouth and the air was good to breathe. Out somewhere toward the barn a bird fled through the night, screeching frantically at its pursuer.

She knew that hostile armies were encamped not far away, awaiting the signal to spring at each other's throats. But no

sound betrayed their nearness. No wagon rumbled over the cobbled bed of a turnpike, no horse neighed, no soldier sang or shouted or called to another. The night was as tranquil as the essence of peace, as unmoved by human distress as those rays of moonlight that sifted through thin clouds to the earth before her. Tomorrow might be a dreadful day, but the night bore no hint of wretchedness to come. The unrest within her was stilled. She went back to bed and slept soundly.

10

At four o'clock on the afternoon of the eighteenth General Forrest sent for Beasley Nichol and Sergeant Goforth.

"There's something I want to know, something I got to know. I like the way you two men work together. Maybe you could find out for me."

"We could try, General Forrest," Nichol said.

"I'm not so much for tryin' unless it gets results. What I want to know is this: Is Rosecrans hauling all o' his supplies out from Chattanooga with wagons? He's got forty, fifty, sixty thousand soldiers. That's a lot and they take a lot o' rations and ammunition. They take a lot o' everything. That many soldiers take so much I don't see how he does it, and I don't believe he does. He hasn't had time to stock up much, and he hasn't got a railroad nearer than town. Our commanding general is getting right absent-minded or he'da found out for himself. You fol-lerin' me?"

"Yes, General Forrest."

"We may whip them. I don't know. I've got so I'm not certain about a lot o' things. We coulda done it ten days ago; maybe we can now. Everything seems to be *maybe*."

"Maybe we can find out."

"Maybe you can. This is what I have in mind. The commanding general gave orders to wreck the W. & A. out of Chattanooga when we were leaving. Unless I'm mistaken some loafer pried out a spike and thought he'd done the work, and nobody bothered to find out that he hadn't. Now, what I think is that

the Yankees drove the spike back in; they're bringing their stuff out somewhere on the line and then hauling it to the army, and saving a little distance and a lot o' hill climbing with the wagons."

"Sounds reasonable, General Forrest."

"It does to me, mighty reasonable. It's about the only way I can work it out. I want you to find out if this is what they're doing, and if so, where? We'll dress you up like General George Thomas and get you through our lines. Then you begin to look for things. I hope I'm not surprising you, Sergeant."

The sergeant's answer implied that surprise was alien to his nature.

"See this map? Right there on that hillside, four hundred yards from the big road, there's a cave. It's really a bluff with a big overhang, a real secret place. Joe Wheeler's got five of his ripsnortingest men in it. They've got horses and supplies, and it's their business to raise Cain when we order them to. We haven't ordered 'em to lately and it's about time. It's something they can do first-rate. If you find the Yankees are using that railroad, hunt the boys up and tell 'em I said wreck the road and the soonest the best, and wreck it so it'll stay wrecked. The Yanks are going to need to haul a lot tonight and tomorrow, and I aim to discourage 'em all I can. I ought to have attended to this before, but things have crowded into my mind like Democrats at a barbecue."

11

The two men, appropriately dressed in Northern uniforms, crossed at Reed's Bridge, rode up the Chickamauga Creek to Dyer's Bridge, then recrossed into Federal territory and turned toward Chattanooga. At Dyer's Mill they took the north fork of the road, pushing north until they came to Kenston's farm. Beyond it they bore to the right again into a road crowded with soldiers marching south. No attention was paid to them. There was nothing odd in a lieutenant and a sergeant riding against the main military current. The day was a trying one for horses. They traveled briskly. Nichol and Goforth didn't press their mounts, for

the night might be filled with riding. At times the dust was almost impenetrable.

"I been here before. They's a good view from yonder." Goforth indicated a place off the road and above them. They led their horses into the timber, tied them and struck out up the ridge. The climbing was difficult and they made slow progress. Presently they came to an open place which afforded a fine prospect of the country eastward.

Nichol looked about him at the beauty on every hand. ". . . look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire . . ."

He came back to the present. He adjusted his field glasses and with them swept the panorama before him, pausing at times to observe spots with more than usual intentness. "There's the railroad," he said. "See it yonder? It looks dead to me."

"Even if they was usin' it they wouldn't run a train out this close to Bed Forrest. Bed's hard on Yankee trains. We better look a little more," Goforth remarked.

They rode on. A mile farther on the road turned to the left and crossed the crest of the ridge to the eastern slope. Again a fine view opened for them, stretching far to the east. On the west it was shut off only by Lookout Mountain.

Sergeant Goforth straightened in his saddle. "Isn't that yonder what you're lookin' for, Lieutenant?"

The air about them was almost clear. It had little of the dust of the main road. A refreshing mountain coolness had come into the atmosphere. Lieutenant Beasley Nichol looked where Goforth pointed. He saw a long thin ribbon of smudge.

"That dust's raised by wagons. Of course, hosses is pullin' 'em, but that's wagon dust."

Nichol considered the scene carefully. "Sergeant, there's sense in that cocklebur you use for a head. So that dust is raised by wagons. What then, Sergeant?"

"That's not the way they'd come if they was comin' out from town. If they ain't comin' out from town, then where they comin' from?"

"Could it be from the railroad, Sergeant?"

"It jes about could. Couldn't be from nowhere else that I can figger out."

"So Bed was right. We have a barnful of generals and Bed's the one who thought of it. I'm in your hands, Sergeant. What do we do next?"

"If that's the railroad, funny we ain't heard no engines whistlin'. I been listenin'."

"A point on which I had meditated some. It could be they don't want us to hear their whistles. The Yankees have a selfish streak. They won't share their whistles with us. They want to keep their whistles to themselves. So they're not using whistles any more."

"Whatever it is they're hauling from, it's somewheres over behind that ridge yonder. Le's you and me go find a place where we can see."

They rode on, following the contour of the hills as they slanted to the north. Nichol reined in his horse and pointed. A half mile ahead of them their road emptied into another. Go-forth, following Nichol's gaze, could see the far end of the depressed lane lined by a decrepit snake fence. As he watched a covered wagon went by in a heavy film of dust, and after forty seconds, another one. For two or three minutes they watched an evenly spaced line of wagons pass. Only one, and it obviously empty, passed in the opposite direction.

"Well, Bed was right. And now, Sergeant, we've got a delicate job on our hands."

"What about Joe Wheeler's men in the cave that Bed told us about? We could use that map and find 'em. That's what Bed expected us to do, wasn't it?"

"Perhaps, but first I'd like to look at the railroad where those wagons are coming from. Where, Sergeant, do you suppose we might get a view of it? Not too close, of course. It might be dangerous, even wearing these uniforms, to get too close. The Yankees always show their worst side when they have the least reason."

"If we could git acrost that road, I could find a place you could see 'em from."

"It's a trade, Sergeant. I'll get you across the road. Then you find a view with lots and lots of lovely Yankee wagons swarming around a railroad track. Come on!"

He started down the lane, whistling merrily. The sergeant followed. Nichol of course was insane, but, as the sergeant saw it, sanity had its disadvantages. Nichol spurred his horse to faster speed. The sergeant followed suit. They entered the road just after a wagon had passed. Nichol used his spurs again and drew abreast of the driver whom, with a great show of authority, he waved to stop. The soldier on the seat with the driver glowered and fingered his musket. The driver was uncertain but the decisiveness of Nichol's command convinced him. He grudgingly drew his team to a halt.

"Is this the wagon for General Thomas' headquarters?" he asked in accents rich in Northern flavor.

"No," answered the harsh-voiced driver. "This is for General Steedman's army."

"Thank you. I suppose the wagon for General Thomas likely has not yet reached here."

Nichol wheeled his horse and galloped back along the road, Goforth following. Fortunately the intervals between wagons lasted until a road turned to the south. They rode into it and a half minute later a wagon rounded a curve and passed.

"We might not have been in much danger just to ride on across but they could get inquisitive and that would slow us down."

They crossed a road. They stopped at a sign from Nichol. "Should we go east or north?"

"I'd say east."

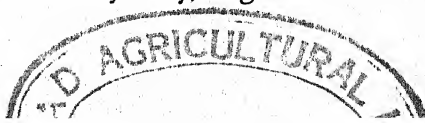
"It'll likely be more risky."

"Sooner or later it'll be risky anyhow. Let's make it sooner and git it over with."

"Spoken after my own heart, Sergeant. We'll do the deed before the purpose cools."

They rode east. The road dipped into a bottom. They came to a ford across a creek.

"The Chickamauga, wouldn't you say, Sergeant?"



"It's it," said Goforth.

Their horses stood drinking from a pool in the creek's bed. Nichol heard a rumble. "They're crossing a bridge. How far up the creek would you say?"

"Three quarters of a mile. Mebbe not more 'n a half."

The rattle stopped. The wagon had crossed the bridge. They rode on across the Chickamauga and up the rocky bank. The trace they were following emerged in a tangled thicket of ash, maple and hickory saplings. They could see that the road—if it could be called that—once clear of the thicket, turned north and ran down the creek. On a little eminence stood a two-story log cabin, dignified and sturdy. A hundred yards beyond the house, and to the right of it, was the railroad! In plain view stood six boxcars, and by them a line of wagons each awaiting its turn.

The two men dismounted and watched the scene. Nichol took out of his pocket the map General Forrest had given them. He studied it intently. "I guess it means that bridge, Sergeant." He pointed to a location on the map. "I guess we've got to wreck it somehow."

"I thought that's about where it would be, Lieutenant. We'll need Ginral Wheeler's men, I reckon."

Nichol sighed. "It's a little delicate for two. I suppose we'll have to call in the reserves."

12

When dark fell Nichol and Goforth were sitting on stone blocks under the bluff where Joe Wheeler's men were quartered. The five soldiers seemed to justify fully the report General Forrest had given of them. They created an air of competence. They talked briefly but to the point about the bridge. It was decided that saws were to be used. There was gunpowder among the supplies under the bluff, and there was kerosene, but the one was too uncertain, and the other too obvious. They would have to use saws. Four of the Wheeler men claimed a modest expertness with saws.

"There'll be guards watching the bridge, of course," said Nichol.

"Likely one at either end, and two sleeping between shifts. It's a lonely place. If they're using the railroad it's strange we haven't heard it," remarked Goforth.

"The Yankees are real reticent in some matters. My guess is they are not blowing any whistles or letting their engines puff any more than they can help. Besides, it isn't much of a grade. The Yankees are great hands at trying to keep secrets. Bed's in a hurry, so suppose we get started."

All mounted their horses and they slipped and slithered down ridge trails until they came to level ground covered with a dark grove. The Wheeler men said they were then about half a mile from the bridge.

The plan they formed was simple. Goforth was to go to one end of the bridge, overcome the sentinel and take his place on the guard post so as to reassure any who might come along; also, to whistle merrily if danger threatened. Nichol was to take the other end. Four of the Wheeler men were to saw the bridge's more vital timbers in two. The fifth was to act as a roving guard watching for the possibility of a sleeping shift of Yankee sentinels. If two or more sentinels guarded at either end, this would be reported back to the waiting group and further plans formulated. If no report was made the sawing would proceed.

Nichol reached the end of the bridge assigned to him. He lay flat on the ground in the dark for what seemed to him many minutes before he heard what he was listening for—the alternating crunch of feet on the gravel of the roadbed and their thump on the ties. Once the man caught his foot against a tie too sharply upraised and he stumbled but regained balance and came on. The sentinel made his way to the bridge's entrance. Nichol was waiting for him behind a boulder as he returned. His pistol wrapped in a folded handkerchief fell with dull violence on the sentinel's head. At the same moment Nichol pulled a strip of cloth over the man's mouth to cut off any cry. It was a short matter to tie him hand and foot and gag him securely.

Nichol heard nothing from across the bridge. Goforth was a

man to attend promptly and completely to assignments. The other end of the bridge was almost surely under control. Nichol began to walk the post, his ears tuned for any sound. He heard saws scratch against timbers, then the regular whine of their cutting.

The bridge was perhaps a hundred feet long, and the deepest place of its span twenty-five feet. Joe Wheeler's men were severing the more important timbers. While he was at the bridge end of his post Nichol could see a lantern below him swing to find the right place. Then the saw would begin to bite again.

An hour passed. The sentinel showed no signs of consciousness. Nichol heard steps coming rapidly across the bridge. He stepped back from the bridge and waited, his pistol ready. The man was walking rapidly. Then by his bulk Nichol recognized Goforth, while Goforth's quick eyes spotted Nichol standing at the side. It was characteristic of the men that each took for granted the other's complete discharge of duty and they asked no questions.

"Listen," said the sergeant.

Nichol was conscious of a distant hum. "I hear it. What is it?" he asked in a low voice.

"It's a train. It's jes about out o' Chattanooga. I heard it when it started."

"Oh," said Nichol. "Oh! So it's a train! Then speed's the word. Get back across. They may have somebody riding ahead to see that all's well. Hurry, Sergeant!"

"Take it twelve, mebbe fifteen minutes to git here." Goforth went hurriedly back the way he had come. Nichol whistled the signal agreed on, and one of the sawers came scrambling up the steep bank.

"A train's coming."

"How long we got?"

"Ten minutes. Can you finish?"

"We'll try."

"When I whistle again all of you come."

The saws bit their way through timber at a faster tempo. The

train was perhaps a mile away and coming slowly. The sentinel was still unconscious. Nichol dragged him farther away from the track. The sound of the saws died away and three of Joe Wheeler's men came up the bank.

"We could have cut some more," said one of them, "but I don't think it'll stand much weight now."

Above the hum of the oncoming train they heard a horse's hoofs on the loose stones on the other side of the bridge. Then a voice spoke through the darkness: "Train's a-comin'. Is everything all right?" said a guard who was evidently riding ahead of the train.

"Yes, sir." Goforth was saying as little as possible lest his speech betray him.

They could hear the horse moving back along the path by which it had come. Then Goforth came running across the bridge.

"Feller whose place I took over there's a-groanin' sumpin' terrible, but he's tied to a stump. That'll hold him long enough."

The other two Wheeler men came up then, and the seven of them stood and watched the headlight as it swept around a curve.

"Sorry if anybody gets hurt," commented Nichol, "but line of duty. They got in Bed's way."

The rattle of the train grew louder, and the ground where they were standing vibrated.

"If nothing happens to that train now, we'll go to work again," said one of the men. "We'll get it sure coming back."

"Safer to get it now," said Nichol.

The train hit the bridge. It hit it with a great rattle, but the bridge held! The engine chugged onto the bridge, then the first car. The bridge swayed perceptibly. It had always swayed. This time it swayed more, but still it held. The engine rattled off the bridge. And then it happened! There was a great crack, then a chorus of creaks and strains and tearing sounds. The bridge buckled and crumbled. Its timbers folded together into the ravine and all the cars followed, falling in a jumbled mass. The coupling between the engine and the first car broke under the

strain and this car went after the others, leaving the engine safe on solid ground, but with its front wheels oddly awry and off the track.

Nichol's quick eyes caught sight of a white face in the engine's window. "Let's get away from here," he said, galvanized into action. "Hurry!"

The wrecked bridge was still cracking, and the cars in the ravine settling into position to an accompaniment of sharp snaps and bumps. The seven men ran to the thicket where their horses were hitched. They mounted and rode along the ridge path as swiftly as they could, for they knew there would soon be a great deal of action about that wrecked bridge. They came in a while to a fork.

The leader of Joe Wheeler's men asked, "Do you want to stay the night with us or get back to Bed Forrest?"

"Bed will be looking for us tonight," answered Nichol. "We'd better report to him as soon as we can. You'll be properly thanked for excellent service."

"Much obliged to you. We needed some excitement. Wouldn'ta missed it for a whole Alabama courthouse. It's a privilege to do Bed a favor any time."

The men parted, Nichol and Goforth bearing to the south. If their luck held General Forrest would have the news by daylight. The moon had risen above the cloud bank, and the shadows of the two horsemen filtered through the leaves and boughs and fell in fragments on the ground.

"Them was mighty good men," commented Sergeant Goforth as they rode abreast through a lane banked by moss-covered stone fences.

"You heard what Bed said—Joe Wheeler's best. They had to be good."

A fox darted out of the shelter of the fence and then ran slowly down the lane ahead of them. It too was a creature for which the night was a season of conquest, and it too used all its cunning to ensnare and destroy its prey. For it there would come no treaty of peace. All its short life it would expend its craft to kill and to escape. Through Nichol's mind ran the thought that



man finds too many of his patterns in the life of the fox—to eat and to sleep, to kill and to escape.

And then a mockingbird in a sycamore tree broke into such a heavenly strain that Nichol grew reassured. The bird was a better patternmaker than the fox. Its message was one of hope, of the awareness of beauty, of joy in living. There was loveliness in the night. The thunder of the cannon was held to silence until it was daylight again. The angry and swelling shouts of soldiers were held to silence by sleep. Tomorrow they would be loosened, and the roar of the guns would crash against the hills, sink into the coves and rise with the mountain slopes. Tonight there was a solemn hush on the land, a lovely prelude to a ghastly scene. The mockingbird was still singing when they rode out of hearing.

"Sergeant, did I ever tell you of the shoes I took from the Yankees on Walden's Ridge?"

"Didn't know you did."

"One trouble with this war, Sergeant Goforth, is that it occupies one's mind too much with trivial things. The very substance of conversation dwindles and dies because one must use up all talk in conjecturing whether to advance or retreat, whether to saw a bridge in two or—— Sergeant, by my troth, you shall hear the stirring tale of the shoes I took from the Yankees."

He was telling the story with gusto when Goforth's keen ears made him interrupt. "Listen!" he said.

The staccato beat of galloping horses sounded crisp and clear against the quiet of the night. The two men drew to a quick stop. It was not strange for horses to gallop where armies were stationed, even in the empty hours of the night. But there was something sinister in the sound then, a subtle threat.

"Where are they, Sergeant?"

"Half a mile. Sounds like four of 'em."

"You know these roads?"

"Not for certain, but I've been over 'em. This road as I recollect goes into the one they're on about a mile ahead of us."

"All right. We'll let them beat us to the fork. I'm not anxious for company; in fact my soul at the moment is most in-

hospitable. I long for solitude. How far would you say it is to Bed's camp?"

"Four miles, mebbe."

"It's an odd matter that Bed always thinks of everything first. Why couldn't General Bragg, or somebody, have thought of that bridge? Why couldn't General Cheatham or General Polk have thought of it?"

"I coulda thought of it myself if I'da tried. I guess the ginrals is jes like me—they don't try."

"Well, now the Yankees'll have to haul their stuff out from town and over Missionary Ridge. It will slow them down after Bed's own heart."

"I'll lay you four bits Bed put Joe Wheeler up to puttin' them men back under that bluff. That's jes like Bed."

"Since you mention it, you might be right, Sergeant. The idea does bear the marks of the general's thinking."

"Course it does. Remember the Prophet and the Fiddlin' Man?" He slowed down his horse. "Them fellers musta been travelin' fast. They done got plumb out o' hearin'."

"Suits me. I could miss them with pure delight. Any company would be too crowding tonight."

Two or three minutes later their road converged with another and the highway they formed bent more to the southeast. A half mile farther on it forked again, one prong turning to the southwest. They stopped.

"Which way would you say, Sergeant?"

The sergeant pointed to the left fork. "I'd take that one."

"It's a matter to be considered," said a Union officer riding from the shadow out into the road. "Please leave your pistols alone, gentlemen. Don't touch them. My men would have to shoot you, and that would be economic but not wholly desirable at the moment. All in good time."

Three horsemen with pistols in hand rode out behind him. Where had Nichol heard that voice? Suddenly he knew.

"Good morning, Captain Whitaker. Are your comrades Princeton men, too?"

"No, I have to confess they're not. They're lacking in certain

advantages. But they make up for it. They're excellent men, very dependable."

"Indeed! Now, take the sergeant here. I dare say he never heard of our alma mater except when I've mentioned her in his presence. And he thinks all the Forrests are named Bedford. Edwin is entirely beyond his ken. But in a crisis Princeton hasn't produced his equal."

"Should you survive the war—which God forbid—we'll debate their relative merits. Just now other duties interrupt that pleasant discussion. Throw your pistols to the ground. At the slightest move my men will fire. And with pistols Princeton hasn't produced their equal."

The cloud moved away from the face of the moon. From almost directly overhead its light fell on the faces of the six men sitting in a cluster on horseback at the crossroads. The eyes of Nichol and Goforth met and each knew the other's thought. It was a desperate chance, but better to take it than be captured in a Northern uniform.

"I think we'd better tie your hands," said Whitaker. "I'd rather not go to the trouble but you're a rash lot. Take no chances; tie them well, Sergeant."

The horse Nichol was riding had been his for more than a year. General Forrest's hostlers had cared for it well when he was assigned to missions on foot. In spare times Nichol had trained it to answer many commands and cues. He looked again at Goforth and he understood Goforth's answering glance. There was a certain pressure with his right heel that the horse knew. It crouched and sprang. Whitaker saw its plunge and fired—too hurriedly. Nichol's horse struck Whitaker's with a jarring thud, threw it sidewise, off balance. Another pressure with the heel, and Nichol's steed sprang again. This time Whitaker's floundered and went down, his leg pinned beneath it.

At the same instant Goforth rode his horse sharply to the side of one of the soldiers. As he did, he suddenly ducked low and two bullets passed through the space occupied by his body a fraction of a second before. He rode to his enemy's side so quickly that the man hadn't time to bring his pistol into play. The ser-

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giant's left hand flicked out to the Yankee's collar and pulled hard. His right fist struck the jaw with all the power engendered by blacksmithing at Manchester before the war. The soldier, unconscious, slumped forward on his horse. One of his comrades fired again at Goforth, and missed. Nichol, leaning far out of his saddle, kicked a horse viciously. It snorted and sprang off the roadside into the trees. Whitaker's horse was trying to regain its feet. Whitaker had risen to one knee.

Nichol gave a shrill whistle. He and Goforth galloped down the road like mad. Two shots followed them but there was no sound of pursuit. They rode at top speed for a mile, then slowed.

"They were waiting for us, Sergeant. Somebody must have been watching us."

"My guess is they was guardin' the train and got behind it coming to the bridge. They figgered out the way we'd go and knew some short cuts."

"Sounds reasonable. Something tells me we shall meet Captain Whitaker again."

"I . . . I mightn't," said Goforth hoarsely.

"Sergeant, what is it? What's the matter?"

"He shot me . . . shot me." Goforth was bending over his saddle. The horses stopped.

"Where, Sergeant, where?"

Goforth was unconscious. Nichol saw the long gash on the side of his head. "Good fellow," Nichol said softly. "It took will power to keep from passing out that long."

He knew they had to get away from there, and quickly. He would not be in position to resist any attack. He rode beside the unconscious man with one hand bracing him in the saddle. He had to get the sergeant to a surgeon somewhere.

They came after a while to Chickamauga Creek. At sight of it Nichol breathed a sigh of relief. Its eastern bank was as yet free of the enemy. They rode through the woods and the moonlight fell on them, now dimly, now in full brightness. A rooster crowed startlingly and Nichol knew that daylight could not be far off.

"Halt," sang a Southern voice. Nichol thanked God. It was

one of Forrest's pickets who had challenged them. A few minutes later Goforth lay on a blanket on the ground and Dr. J. B. Cowan knelt at his side and dressed the wound. A farmhouse was a few hundred yards away.

"Carry him over there. If he rallies, and he likely will, we'll take him to the field hospital at Mrs. Napier's. You'd better report to General Forrest, Lieutenant."

But his eyes were grave when he said it. From across the creek came the rattle of musketry and the shouting of soldiers.

13

Early the next afternoon Dr. Ray came. "Dr. Cowan's busy at the hospital. He asked me to look at this soldier," he said to the orderly.

After ten minutes he came out on the porch. "He's better off than I expected. He'll be all right. He can be moved just as soon as you can get an ambulance. We'll take him to the hospital. He'll be better cared for there."

It was little trouble to get an ambulance, and at three o'clock they carried Goforth, still unconscious, to one of the cots at Mrs. Napier's. They drove so as to skirt the fighting. As an undertone to the cannon could be heard the distant shouting of men, a shrill and a savage chanting that left the blood chilled.

14

Late in the afternoon of the eighteenth Judd and Wheeler sat on a log and talked. Apparently activities for the day had ceased, but they were told that the morrow would begin early.

"When I think of what they're going to feed us for supper I ain't so sure I joined the right army," said Corporal Judd.

"What you say me and you take a walk?" inquired Corporal Wheeler. "Mebbe the right vittles'll turn up. Is your nose still workin'?"

"I say le's find out if it is."

So they took a walk along what in weather less arid would have been a full-sized creek.

"I remember oncet," said Corporal Wheeler, "when I was soldierin' somewhere around Lebanon, Ma sent me some fried dried-apple pies and I give Ginral Forrest four——"

"Yes, I know," Corporal Judd broke in with some impatience; "I ought to know by now. I've done heard you tell it nineteen times."

"And how many times—excuse me if it's a subject you don't want brought up—have I had to set and lissen about the time you went home on a furlough and when you left they chopped the chicken house up for kindlin' wood?"

Corporal Judd chose to ignore his comrade's repartee. "I reckon we'll have the big battle tomorrer. Everybody says so. Now, me, I ain't no good in a fight unless I've had meat to eat. Give me plenty o' meat and I'll whup ten Yankees. When I ain't had meat I'll run from three—well, anyhow four, that is if I'm a-feelin' a little skittish to begin with like I am now. One time——"

"Ain't that the time I done heard about?"

"No sir, it was positively another time. We fought with the Yankees somewhere over around Jasper—what I call thicket fightin' and nothin' to brag about. Besides rations had run low like always. And I hadn't had a bite of meat in four days. When I saw them twelve Yankees, ever' one over six feet high, advancin' on me, ever' speck o' my grit plumb give out and I turned and run and they took out after me. I run about seven miles, mebbe eight, puttin' 'em farther behind me on every step.

"I passed a house out in the country. A woman run out and hollered for me to stop. 'Here's some souse meat,' she says. 'If the Yankees are comin', they'd get it all and I'd ruther one of our noble men had it.' So I took it and slowed down to eat it and fust thing you know I'd stopped plumb still. I didn't intend to. I didn't know I was stoppin'. It was that souse meat. Then I turned aroun' and took out after them Yankees and when they saw me comin' they jes surrendered.

"At that time they was payin' nine dollars a head for Yankee prisoners. If you don't believe it, jes read your history book.

That brought me more 'n a hundred dollars. Like to hear what I done with the money? Well, I bought Joe Wheeler's cavalry and give 'em all to Bed. That's the reason Bed's got such a good army. Want to hear—?"

"Shet up," hissed Wheeler. "Ain't that a ground hog?" He answered his own question with a swiftly cut arc of his throwing arm. Down below them by a tangle of drought-stricken blackberry bushes a ground hog quivered, then lay still.

It was a big ground hog. They skinned it, dressed it and cooked it in the proper manner over embers of hickory bark. Wheeler had along a little package of salt. Judd used it expertly. They didn't hurry the cooking. The ground hog approached perfection slowly. They turned the meat patiently and kept the bed of embers replenished.

They didn't need to return to the camp for rations. They feasted on meat. Judd wiped his mouth on some leaves plucked from a hickory tree. "I'm a different man," he said. "Let's go over to the Eighth Tennessee to hear the preaching. I feel full enough to relish some tiptop preaching."

The word had gone out that Chaplain Dewitt was to preach to the Eighth Tennessee right after supper. He made it a point to preach the night before he felt a battle was imminent. He had preached the night before the battle of Fishing Creek, the night before Shiloh and, since he had missed his first guess, for two consecutive nights before the awful affair at Murfreesboro.

"Men who are going to meet their Maker sometimes ought to be led to think about Him, and if they are going to meet Him tomorrow the need is much greater. I won't preach them a doctrinal sermon. It's no time for that."

"My notion to a yearling gnat's heel," answered General Frank Cheatham heartily. "Preach to 'em any time you want to, Parson. I'm for it."

Colonel John Anderson, the immediate commander of the Eighth Tennessee, was equally co-operative, though he added a flippant note that annoyed the preacher. "Trouble with you, Brother Dewitt, is that you're too deep. I'm a shallow man. Any time I hear you preach I got to take a swig of apple brandy before I find out what you mean."

"Then I suppose I'd better stop preaching." The preacher's tones were sharp. "Woe unto him that causes his brother to stumble!"

"Go ahead and preach, Brother Dewitt. You're safe this time. I've done handed over every drop of apple brandy I got to the doctors."

So Brother Dewitt went ahead and preached. The Eighth Tennessee was encamped close to a spot that easily lent itself to the purposes of an amphitheater. From a small level place, which served as a pulpit, the ground rose in a gentle incline on three sides. There the soldiers sat. The Eighth Tennessee was on hand to a man, and soldiers came from other detachments, for Chaplain Dewitt's fame as a preacher had spread and they liked preaching. Some units of Forrest's army were near by and many of his men were in the audience. Corporals Syracuse Judd and Ed Wheeler sat on the front row. They were at peace with the world, being temporarily well-fed.

The preaching was prime that night. Brother Dewitt was in the spirit and he delivered a powerful sermon. He knew what happened at battles, the dreadful harvests gathered up by the ambulances and the litter-bearers. Earnestly he sought to engage his hearers in an appraisal of values, to make them realize that the routine of death on the battlefield is unknowable, that one may be taken and the other left, and the answer is with God. He yearned to lead them to grave thought about the life which a day hence they might not have.

He brought his sermon to a close and he didn't ask for a song. He didn't wish their minds to be distracted from the depth of his message. He shook the hands of the soldiers who crowded about him. Then he went out into the grove where his horse was hitched. He unhitched his horse, mounted it and started to the Napier home to see his wife.

When the sermon was over Corporals Judd and Wheeler struck off along a path that led at an easy oblique angle up the hill. They were comfortably fed—and with meat. They had

heard a good sermon. Tomorrow, for all they knew, might be a bloody affair. But sufficient unto tomorrow would be its evil.

"The devil hisself ain't no equal to Brother Dewitt," testified Corporal Wheeler. "He wouldn't try no tussle with the Reverend."

"He wouldn't out in the open," said Judd, "but the ol' devil is a sneakin' scoundrel. You don't know what he's up to till it's too late."

"Must be something like a Yankee sharpshooter," commented Corporal Wheeler.

"You might say that," said Judd, his head cocked at a judicial angle. "Still, I'd take my chances on a Yankee."

"Evenin', gents and feller ham stealers," greeted the chief driver of General Cheatham's wagons. He sat with his friend College Grove on a log where they too considered the various facets of Chaplain Dewitt's theology. "You out follerin' your nose agin?"

"I follered it after we had that little thicket ruckus with the Yanks at three o'clock."

"Any luck?"

"If a ground hog's luck, we had some."

"A ground hog cooked right is prime vittles. What you fellers fixin' to do?"

"We might open a keg o' nails, or sumpin. You all been to the preachin'?"

"I'm the feller that hollered 'amen.' Ain't nothin' I like better 'n to hear Brother Dewitt git to feudin' with Ol' Satan."

"Ifn Ol' Satan had good sense he'd never git tangled up with that preacher," observed College Grove. "He can shore make a sermon talk."

"I seen sumpin afore the preachin' that got me to thinkin'," said the driver.

"That's the way with him," College Grove sagely remarked. "That's the way he always is. He sees sumpin. He gits to thinkin', and then ever'body gits into bad trouble. I seen it happen all over the army. They's bad times a-comin', and I'm a-lookin' for a big rock to crawl under."

"About sundown or a little afore I took me a spyglass and

went on a walk jes to see anythin' I could look at. Well, sir, they was plenty and I seen it. Down the creek a piece they's a place where it's purty nigh dry, so I went acrost it. Right there they's a wide creek bottom, then they's a hill and the land kinda sidles up for looks like a mile. They ain't no fences acrost that hill and it's purty smooth. When I used my spyglass, what you reckon I see on top o' that hill?"

"Ain't no tellin'," remarked College Grove. "When you git to lookin' through a spyglass you liable to see anything, mebbe a lan' flowin' with milk and honey."

"Jes about. They's Yankee wagons up there. Looks like a right smart o' 'em."

"I wisht we had one of 'em," remarked Corporal Syracuse Judd wistfully.

"That's presactly what I'm comin' to. One of them wagons is standin' right on the edge of the hill. Jes a little shove and it'd land right down in the bottom lessen it turned over, and that hill looked mighty smooth to me."

"Oh-ho! And who's a-goin to give it the shove?" inquired College Grove with great irony. "You ain't got no invite to go up there and start shovin', have you?"

"I've knowed a passel o' good shovers in my time and they ain't a one can shove a bit better 'n you."

"And you want me to go up that hill when it's like daylight and say to the Yankees, 'You fellers stan' over to one side. I got a pardner that's down there at the creek waitin' for this wagon and he wants me to give it a shove. Stand over there like I said. I need room when I shove.'"

"I aim to be fair," said the driver patiently. "I aim for ever' one of us to go up there and shove, and I aims for you to do your part."

"All of us?" College Grove was still ironic. "Ain't that sorta wasteful? You must be a-feelin' a mite puny, pardner."

"I craves some excitement," said the driver. "What you all say we traipse up that hill and take us a look?"

"What you all say you go first, so when them Yankees start shootin'——"

"You didn't wait for me to stop tellin' you. They's a little clump o' woods runs up along the side o' that cleared hill. We'll go up it."

"What's in the wagon?" asked Corporal Judd.

"I'll lay a dollar to a dime's worth o' nothin' it ain't empty," the driver said. "Sometimes the Yankees haul vittles in their wagons."

"I say, le's git started," said Judd.

They went slowly up the hill, using the little clump of wood as a screen. The two corporals carried pistols, the driver had his faithful whip. College Grove picked out some good throwing rocks, and so did Wheeler, for he was more confident of his prowess with them than with his pistol.

Drifting clouds were in the sky, and as they rode there would occur alternate periods of bright moonlight and soft, gray shadow.

"Don't make no more noise 'n you can help," cautioned the driver. "You can't tell about the Yankees. They're mighty on-certain folks."

A little more than halfway up they stopped to mature their plans. The driver had a notion which he thought might work. They stood in silence for a full minute listening for evidence of near-by Yankees. They heard none and the driver divulged his plan. Doubtless the Yankees maintained a line of sentinels to guard their precious wagons. Also without doubt the line reached to, probably into, the clump of woods. All right, the driver would attend to the fellow who patrolled that stretch. He wouldn't kill him, that being unethical on account of their not being in a regular battle, but he would render the fellow temporarily uninterested in the care of the wagons assigned him. After that they could study the lay of the land and decide what to do. The notion sounded reasonable and practicable, and all agreed.

They moved on up the hill, stopping every hundred feet or so to listen for warning sounds. They were nearing the summit when they first heard the sentinel's tread. Then the moon moved from behind a cloud and they saw him. He was coming toward

them. They waited, concealed in the shadow of the thicket. Soon they saw that his route reached the trees fifty feet nearer the summit than they were standing. They saw him enter the woods. He kept going and emerged on the other side and then moved straight on across another open space.

"Le's go now," said College Grove.

"Too risky. He might turn aroun' right now and that would shet us off. Le's see what happens. What's that?"

They heard indistinct voices coming from the direction of the sentinel.

"That's where he meets another one and turns back. You fellers get steady."

The sentinel was returning. The driver said, "Lucky I got another in the wagon. I reckon I'll have to use this one."

He took off an old, worn but reasonably clean shirt. He drew from his pocket a length of cord and handed it to College Grove. "When I grab him you fellers come in a hurry and tie him. We got to work fast."

He moved cautiously through the thin copse. They saw him stop a moment, evidently considering, then he disappeared behind a tree. The sentinel reached the fringe of the woods and entered it. They saw the bulk of the driver's form emerge and spring catlike on the unsuspecting Yankee. They heard a convulsive struggle, a sort of gurgle. By that time they were at the spot. The driver had in one dexterous movement covered the man's face with the tightly held shirt and pinned his two arms behind his back. The sentinel was a burly fellow and would have caused the driver trouble had not help arrived at that moment. Soon he was expertly gagged, and bound hand and foot to a tree. The driver picked up his musket. The four of them went quickly out into the field, obliquely up the slope to the wagon standing at the brow of the hill.

"Ifn you hear anything, scatter and run like skeered rabbits and don't stop to look back," whispered the driver. "I shore hope they ain't no Yankees sleepin' in that wagon."

They reached it without interruption. Apparently no Northern soldier was near. But something troubled the driver.

"Longest wagon tongue I ever see," he muttered. "Can't no wagon take a trip by itself with a tongue like that."

He knew what to do. He unscrewed two bolts, one of them stubborn but yielding to his viselike grip. He pulled the tongue out of its socket and let it gently down to the ground. A chain rattled and they held their breath, but still nothing happened. The Yankees seemed to be soundly sleeping.

"Shove!" ordered the driver. They shoved. The wagon was heavy but the ground was firm. It answered their pressure. It moved slowly at first. Then it reached the rim of the hill and required no further shoving. It had reached the slope.

"Hop on! We can ride it a piece," said the driver.

They swung onto the back of the wagon, Judd first and the driver last of all. It gathered speed and developed noise. There was a shout behind them, followed by a confusion of outcries.

"This is gittin' too fast; it's liable to git dangerous. Git off!" shouted the driver.

They swung off, throwing themselves forward with the wagon. The driver and College Grove were used to such procedures and they landed on their feet, ran a few steps forward and braked themselves to a stop. Wheeler landed sitting down. He thrashed about a bit and righted himself. "Where's Judd?" he yelled.

The driver surveyed the situation. "He didn't get off. I reckon he aims to git a ride all the way down the hill. Now me, I'd ruther walk."

"I guess he musta wanted him some excitement," said College Grove. "They's a hill back home where I used to——"

Corporal Wheeler had a more pertinent idea. "It mighta been that the wagon had grub in it and he didn't want to git separated from it. Vittles is right appealin' to him."

"Anyhow he's goin' to beat us down the hill all right. Listen at that."

What College Grove referred to was the clank, bump and rattle of the wagon traveling wildly down the slope. But the driver heard other sounds more threatening. Back on the ridge behind them there were yelling and running and horses plunging about while being mounted.

"Git over in the woods and run," ordered the driver. "And I mean don't piddle aroun'."

Before they got to the creek things began happening down ahead of them. There was more shouting, and a few shots were fired.

"Stay over here," said the driver. "That must be our men a-stirrin' up a ruckus. But what are they doing on this side o' the creek?"

16

His question was a good one. They were indeed Southern soldiers who were causing the racket at the foot of the hill.

At sunset on the eighteenth Cheatham had moved some of his units across the creek and they were at work making ready for the night. All of a sudden they heard a terrible racket coming down the hill through the dark toward them. One thought was in all minds: *Yankees!* The men ran, stumbling over one another to the stacks in which they had placed their muskets. Officers began to shout orders, and a gun crew started to turn a cannon about to rake the hillside with grapeshot. A hundred feet from the bottom one of the front wheels of the runaway wagon struck a loose stone which pulled it sharply around to the left. The wagon shifted its course, struck the level bottom land at high speed, careened across the strip of it for fifty feet and crashed into a stone fence marking the field's northern boundary. The Confederates on the creekbank heard the crash.

"Cannon!" yelled a captain. "Take to cover!"

At that moment General Frank Cheatham galloped up. "What's wrong?" he bellowed. "Where they attacking?" Those he questioned merely pointed. "Get the rest of the army across the creek!" he roared. "We haven't enough over here to stand off an attack."

A courier wheeled his horse, but just then the driver, College Grove and Corporal Wheeler ran up calling out that it wasn't Yankees that made all the racket, but one of the wagons, refugeeing from the Yankee Army.

"A wagon!" General Cheatham's voice rippled the topmost leaves still remaining on the sycamore trees. "What's a wagon got to do with all this ruckus?"

"Let's go see, Ginral." The driver struck out across the bottom, followed by his two companions, General Cheatham and sundry of his staff. They came to the wagon tilted crazily with one wheel barely thwarted in an effort to climb the fence and resting where it stopped.

"Stay away from it!" commanded General Cheatham. "May be an ambush."

"Ifn there's anybody in it, Ginral," said the driver, "it's one of Ginral Forrest's men."

"How'd you know who's in it?" roared General Cheatham. "You running Yankee wagons, too?"

The driver climbed over the back gate into the wagon. "Here, hand me that lantern," he yelled. "It's darker 'n a whale's insides in here." They handed him a lantern. He looked about him. "Here's a feller done knocked into four o'clock next Wednesday week."

He dragged Judd out. The moon swam into the open, and those standing about looked with apprehension at the man who lay inert on the ground.

"Is he dead?" bawled General Cheatham from his horse. "Who is he?"

"Liver 'n a cricket," answered the driver. "Jes stove up some when the wagon hit the fence. Hit his haid agin the wagon bed, I reckon. The bed may be damaged some but he ain't. He's Corporal Judd, sir, with Ginral Forrest."

"Funny thing this wagon breaking loose by itself up there on that hill. How'd a man from General Forrest's army get in it? How'd you three fellows know so quick what happened? I hope you haven't got to be soothsayers or fortunetellers. You old scoundrel, I'm goin' to take to locking you in your wagon every day at sundown. Only way to keep peace in this army."

"Why, Ginral, ifn we got to have a battle no harm in gittin' it started, is there? Looks to me like a purty good way to save time. Some of the Yankees chased that wagon a hundred yards

down the hill and I thought the battle had got goin' then, but they give up and went back."

"What's in the wagon?" demanded General Cheatham.

"I looked aroun' some while I was in there with the lantern. As nearly as I could make out it's full of pickled beef and chewin' tobacco."

"Then that's the reason Judd wouldn't leave the wagon when we did," Corporal Wheeler said with conviction. "That feller's got funny notions. They's some wagons he jes natchelly likes to stay with."

17

Lookout Mountain runs from Chattanooga across the north-western corner of Georgia and tapers out at Gadsden, Alabama, eighty-three miles away. South of Chattanooga and east of Lookout Mountain the land is a great tangle of spurs, jutting away from the main ridge and losing themselves among level creek lands and little hills covered by scrub timber. The dwarfed and ancient cedar trees are gnarled and knotted. One of these spurs is called Pigeon Mountain. Eastward from its tip is Lafayette, Georgia, twenty-eight miles south of Chattanooga. The land between Pigeon Mountain and the main body of Lookout is Mc-Lemore's Cove. From it issues historic Chickamauga Creek which flows a tortuous course into the Tennessee four miles above the city. North of Pigeon Mountain a long, narrow ridge has been split by the forces of time and nature from the parent Lookout, and Chattanooga Creek flows between the two. This strip of highland was christened Missionary Ridge, since in the early days it was the site of a Presbyterian mission. Eastward from it is a country of little hills and valleys, farms and woodlands covered with stunted timber. Through these Chickamauga Creek makes its devious way between the sycamores and willows that line its banks.

The armies of the North very blunderingly got trapped by the mountains. Their hope was to get behind the retreating Con-

federates. They made forced marches by short cuts down the valleys, through the passes and into the coves. There any strategic attack by the Southern forces would have left them shattered, but the attack was not made. The chieftains of the Southern armies waited until it was too late. The Northern troops had to get out of the mountains. So by the gaps and passes, over the summits and down the rocky slopes they broke out of the encircling hills. Between Missionary Ridge and Chickamauga Creek the two armies met and watered the drought-stricken land with their blood.

18

Saturday, September 19, 1863, dawned hot but with a sky streaked with clouds. Perhaps the day would have some periods of respite from a sun that had been pitiless so long that it had sucked the vitality out of man and beast alike. The taste of dust was bitter on the tongue. There had been activity up and down Chickamauga Creek since midnight. Night had laid a restraining hand upon the dust but offered no full warranty against the plague of it.

General Nathan Bedford Forrest sat on a log in the thinning gloom and drank hot coffee and chewed on a hard biscuit. General Frank Cheatham stood in front of Forrest and gulped his coffee. Neither had slept, but the eyes of both were bright.

"Well, Frank, looks like this is the day. We've got orders to move out at sunup."

"Move where?"

"Straight ahead. That's where the Yankees are, plenty of 'em, too many of 'em, so many of 'em I'm worried. Looks to me like we've invited Abe Lincoln's whole kit and caboodle down for the openin' exercises. It isn't goin' to be easy, Frank. We're in for trouble, plenty o' trouble. It woulda been easy a week ago, but it's not goin' to be now."

"I expect you're right, Bed. Just between me and you things don't look good to me either."

"What is to be will be. I'm going out in a few minutes with three or four regiments. First Yankees we see we're goin' to hit 'em. Chances are there'll be at least a division of them. We'll try to scare the living daylights out of 'em, and if they don't scare we'll run like a skeered rabbit."

"That'd be worth seeing, Bed," commented Cheatham. "Don't remember ever seeing you run that fast. You run up and crawl back. That makes me think. We had some fun last night. About ten o'clock you'd have thought every bluecoat in kingdom come was charging down the hill in front of my camp. You never heard such a racket. We got a cannon set ready to shoot, and every man got his musket ready, his or some other soldier's, and we ran around in circles hoping to save the South or die. What you reckon it was?"

"Maybe a rabbit hopping around in the grass."

"Rabbit, my hind foot! It was one of the Yankee wagons up on top of the long hill that got loose and landed in our midst. It made as much racket as you're liable to hear today. I got soldiers that won't be over their scare for a week."

"What was in the wagon?"

"Pickled beef and plug tobacco."

"Right helpful. I could use some o' both. Anybody help that wagon get loose?"

"It looked to me like some of your noble soldiers were mixed up in it."

The muted notes of a bugle sounded.

"Time to be goin'," said General Forrest climbing into the saddle. "Good luck, Frank!"

General Forrest rode off with General John Pegram. It was a sight to stir the blood—five hundred horsemen riding across the meadow; five hundred spaced as for a review; five hundred sitting on their horses with the incomparable grace of Forrest's chosen men; five hundred riding in the soft dim light of the last few moments on the night side of sunrise.

They rode across the meadow, up a rocky hill and through a sparse woodland of starved oaks. They moved out of the trees onto the downward slope that dipped slowly to another meadow.

They rode through the stunted cedars on the hillside toward the meadow.

"Look!" said Forrest reining his horse close to Pegram. "Some questions are going to be answered today, John."

Pegram's gaze followed Bedford Forrest's finger. The sun was five or six minutes high, and its young light glinted on the steel of an army not more than a mile away, marching steadily to the northeast.

"Back up, John! They haven't seen us. Too many to jump on out in the open."

They pulled their horses back into the trees, and the soldiers behind them came to a halt. General Forrest sat on his horse in the shadow of the trees watching the long lines of marching men in the distance. His eyes turned to the north, gravely studying the terrain, noting the alternate courses of woodland and field, of hill and dale. General Forrest was never one to dally with his thinking.

"All right," he said to Pegram in the harsh crisp voice he used when battle was imminent. "We'll get back behind the brow of the hill and we'll follow it just out of their sight till we get to those woods yonder. Hosses won't be much good there, so we'll hitch 'em in that orchard we saw yesterday. Then we'll hide in the woods till they pass and shoot the socks off 'em. Give the word!"

They resumed their march, though with course shifted toward the orchard of which the general spoke.

"Looked like a lot of them," said Pegram.

"Four to one, maybe. That's not too bad sometimes. I've tackled six to one, but it was risky. If it gets too hot we can take our hosses and scoot."

"You know this country, don't you, General? Where do you think they're bound?"

"What it amounts to is they're trying to git the whole Yankee Army into good fighting position, and my guess is they can do that about two or three miles north o' here. Well, some of 'em is due for a spell of excitement before they git there."

The men hitched their horses in the orchard. They took special

care to hitch them well and in as much shade as possible. Forrest's troopers were thoroughly indoctrinated in the proper care of horses.

The men got into the woods and placed themselves in the positions assigned. They checked their guns and looked to their ammunition. Then they stood and waited for orders. They could see the Yankees, endless lines of them. They were now about a half mile away and marching briskly. Officers were riding just behind the front and between the files.

Colonel Biffle came up. "General Forrest, please get somewhere that's not so exposed. It's too dangerous here and we can't spare you."

"Maybe I got nine lives. Maybe this is my day to be called. Where'd you say for me to go?"

"There's an old sawmill back there a piece. It's far enough away to be right safe and it's close enough to keep in immediate communication."

"Oh, all right. Every time the Yankees come in sight my men start to get fond of me. Come on, John."

Ten feet away he stopped and spoke to Colonel Biffle. "At three hundred yards let 'em have it. Looks like Rosecrans' whole army to me. I reckon I'll be back purty soon. Let 'em have it at three hundred yards."

General Forrest had been gone only a few minutes when the woods crackled with the fire of muskets. Eight blue-clad soldiers fell to the ground. A sharp order rang out and was relayed to the rear of the Union files. Answering it the Northern soldiers fell flat on their faces after the manner of Indian fighters. Then they began to fire back at their unseen enemy in the woods. For a half hour the situation remained the same, desultory firing on both sides and no particular harm done.

Suddenly his men heard General Forrest's rasping voice. He and General Pegram had come back from the sawmill. "Who's the best tree climber here?"

"Corporal Ed Wheeler, sir," bawled a private. "He's got squirrel blood in him."

"I thought all he could do was throw rocks and eat. Here,

Fried Pie, skin up this tree quick. I want to know what's happening out there. I don't like them being so quiet. It's not natural. Find out what they're up to."

Wheeler climbed the tall pine with the alacrity of one of his alleged kinfolk. He paused when the smallness of the tree made further climbing precarious. He surveyed the land to the west, then to the south.

"Jerusalem!" he yelled. "General Forrest, there's a million Yankees coming!"

"I thought it. How far away, Wheeler?"

"My guess is a little over a mile, mebbe a mile and a half. No, I don't think they're that far."

"Stay up there, Wheeler, and holler what you see. Stay till we tell you to come down. Captain Huggins, you get your hoss and burn the wind to General Polk. Tell him I got to have help. Old Rosey's trying to take his spite out on me. Tell him to send me Armstrong's division. If he can't send it, send anybody he can. And tell him to hurry up."

19

Captain Huggins galloped away. Ten minutes later he was back with word from General Polk that the battle was developing on a broad front; he couldn't send Armstrong but Ector's brigade was already en route.

"I read about the boy that held the ocean back with his finger. That's just about our size. Well, anyhow we can try. How far away do you think they are now, Wheeler?"

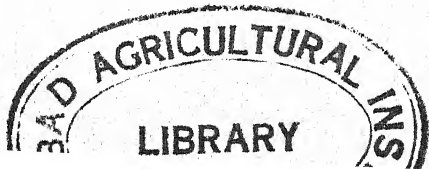
"Three quarters of a mile, sir, and comin' fast."

"Pegram, I'm going to take a ride down the road to spy out the land. I need to know what it looks like. I'll be right back. Don't give 'em an inch."

Pegram placed two cannon down at the edge of the woods and made ready to use them.

"They're deploying, Ginral," bawled Wheeler.

"Captain Huggins, tell the men to hold their fire until they can get sure aim."



"They're comin' in a run, Ginral," Wheeler called.

His cry was lost in the growing storm. The soldiers in blue were charging down the slope. On they came in waves across the narrow level valley, till fire spouted from all the parts of the wood. The bluecoats wavered, then came on steadily, but the cannon and rifles crashed together and pushed them back across the level space. It was nine o'clock and the sun was pouring intolerable heat on the hillside. The Yankees wouldn't remain still under that sun and those bullets that hissed from the woods.

General Forrest galloped back. "They'll try it again," he said. "If they get across the valley let every man break for his horse and follow me. Shoot them cannon at 'em once and then get away from here."

A general wearing three stars came riding by the edge of the woods. "What infantry is this?" he asked a soldier.

"Infantry! Sir, this is no infantry. This is General Forrest's cavalry. It fights both ways. There's the hosses yonder." He gestured toward the orchard.

The general turned to his companion. "I must have had the wrong idea of cavalry," he said as they rode away.

"Wasn't that Harvey Hill?" Forrest asked.

Pegram nodded, and at that moment Wheeler called out that the enemy were coming again.

"I guess we'd better move," said Forrest.

The cannoneers fired, wheeled their horses and started back through the woods. The men ran to the orchard for their horses and were off to the north, first in a trot then at a gallop.

Corporal Ed Wheeler was forgotten in the excitement. The corporal was himself so engrossed in the foemen's rush that his predicament escaped him until they had almost reached the tall pine tree to which he clung. The Yankees swept through the woods in serried lines. They shifted their eastward course, bending to the north in pursuit of the retreating Confederates. As they charged through the woods not one lifted his eyes to the

tree where Ed Wheeler, goggle-eyed, watched developments. He heard a sudden fury of musketry that sounded half a mile away. He judged that General Forrest had been reinforced and had engaged the enemy again.

Something near at hand caught his interest. Several large wagons had followed the Northern troops, skirting the woods. Almost even with Wheeler, the lead horse of one of them had surged violently and fallen to the ground dead. A bullet fired by a fleeing Confederate had found its mark. Other drivers shouted something to the driver of the disabled wagon but kept going.

A noble idea took possession of the corporal's mind. He climbed down and cautiously made his way out of the woods. The driver stood by the side of the wagon, a musket in his hand. Wheeler's first rock missed its target by inches. The driver staggered back against the wagon, looking wildly about and bringing his rifle to his shoulder. The second rock didn't miss. The soldier went down. Wheeler tied him hand and foot and bundled him into the wagon.

Then he ran to the orchard. His horse was still there. In a minute he was back at the wagon with it. Corporal Wheeler was adept in all the techniques of horsemanship. He stripped the harness from the dead horse. He took the saddle from his horse and pitched it into the wagon on top of the unconscious Yankee. He put the harness on his horse and turned the wagon about and proceeded to drive around the left flank of the Northern troops on his way to rejoin General Forrest. He came upon a few Northern troops very unexpectedly, but he kept driving. They noted that the wagon belonged to their side and paid no attention to the driver's uniform. He drove on unchallenged.

General Forrest found a place that suited his taste in strategy. He placed his troops there, and immediately was reinforced by General Ector's brigade. He waited for the Yankees. They came warily over a hill, stopped and recoiled into its shelter. They

knew by then that Forrest was their opponent and the very name inspired timidity.

The general, his field glasses held closely to his eyes, watched them. "Get the batteries ready," he said, "and when you see blue coming over that ridge start shooting. Here, Wheeler, climb this tree and see what you can look at." There was no answer. He waited a moment. "Where's Fried Pie gone now?"

"He was up in a pine tree back yonder the last time I saw him," a trooper answered. "You ordered him to stay till you told him to come down."

"Jehosephat, didn't the fool have sense enough to come down without me tellin' him when he saw the Yankees comin'? Oh, never mind, we'll go and rescue him just as soon as we get the war finished."

"I look for him to turn up any time," said Corporal Syracuse Judd. "Wheeler's a great hand for turnin' up."

"Well, we really can't leave a man like that," said the general. "Lieutenant Nichol, glad you got here. How'd you leave the corporal? You sashay around and see if that nincompoop is still up that tree. If he is, say to him that General Forrest offers his compliments and graciously permits him to descend."

Lieutenant Nichol saluted and left in a gallop, bearing far around to the right. Thirty minutes later he came back to say that he had ridden through the woods, observing carefully; the pine tree had nothing human in it. He hadn't seen anything out of routine except a dead horse lying out at the edge of the grove.

"God help the Yankees if they've captured him!" said General Forrest fervently. "Within a week they'll have rations for neither hoss nor man."

"Wheeler won't stay captured, General Forrest," said Corporal Judd reassuringly. "Wheeler won't like the Yankees, so he'll leave 'em. He's a great hand to leave when he don't like a place."

They had other things to think of, for right then the Yankees came over the hill in a desperate charge. They came at a run, but they couldn't stand the leaden rain poured into them by Forrest's dismounted cavalymen. They went back, carrying their dead

and wounded with them. An hour later, they came again, and this time they got much nearer before the stinging bullets forced them to retreat. Three times they came, and though the last time they got within a hundred feet of the waiting men in gray, they withdrew wounded and stricken. They would not charge again that day.

The soldiers against whom they charged were stricken, too. Four were dead within the grove and nine were wounded. General Forrest's men buried their dead, and rickety ambulances carried the wounded to the field hospital at the Napier house two miles away.

The sun was falling behind the mountain ridge to the west, but there was no quiet in the land. It was as if the whole world had resolved itself into one vast orgy of rifle fire. Southward the cannon rumbled angrily among the hills. Forrest's men could hear its first sullen roar; then one by one the mountain ranges caught it and multiplied it into a continuity of cannonade. In the foreground, on all sides except to the east, the world crackled with the musketry. The pungent smell of gunpowder was heavy on the air, and all the countryside was revealed against a tapestry of of dust and smoke.

All day long the hot sun had been prodigal with its heat on an earth already baked. All day long soldiers of both armies had been stricken with the torture of thirst. The teams of five Union supply wagons ran away and did not stop until they reached the refreshing pools of Chickamauga Creek.

"Give the men their supper early," General Forrest said. "Tomorrow's going to be a hard day—and it may be a long one. They'll need every minute of sleep they can get."

"General, you asked the cooks to prepare the soldiers' rations before the wagons started," said Captain Huggins.

"Well, what's wrong with that?"

"Nothing, General, except they didn't get it done in time, and now the Yankees are between them and us."

"Jehosephat, of course I did! What's the matter with my mind? Does that mean this army's without vittles?"

"Temporarily, General."

"We can't have these men starvin' and fightin' both."

"Of course not, General Forrest," said Huggins soothingly. "We expected to have the enemy pushed back out of the way by now."

"How would them wagons git here now?"

"They'd have to drop back two or three miles across the creek and come down on the other side."

"That'd take too long."

"Well, starting now, with the roads what they are, they wouldn't likely make it before ten o'clock."

"Get word to 'em to start. We'll do the best we can till they show up. Nichol will carry the word. He rides good on an empty stomach."

Nichol left at his usual gallop.

"I reckon I'm gettin' old to let a thing like that get out o' my mind."

"We all forget things," Huggins said.

"We ain't got no business to. What in blazes is that?"

That was the rattle of an approaching wagon. It came from the north.

"What's a stray wagon doin' there?" asked the general. Nobody answered him. It drew nearer, and many eager glances were turned on it through the dusk.

"Blast my eyes!" exclaimed General Forrest. "Isn't that rascal Wheeler a-drivin' it?"

Whose wagon's he stole this time? Corporal Syracuse Judd asked himself. Someday he's a-goin' to git in a peck o' trouble with his wagon stealin'.

It was Wheeler indeed. There was a great deal of conscious pride in his re-entry into General Forrest's army.

"Where you been, and what you been doin', and what did you see, and where'd you get that wagon, and what's in it?" roared the general.

"I been comin'," the corporal said simply, "ever since I whupped the whole Yankee Army right up there where you left me and took this wagon from 'em. And there's a hundred 'n twenty-five gallons o' good thick beef stew in here. I know it's

good because I sampled it. It ain't much hot no more but that can be tended to."

"Who's this fellow?" An officer was peering inside the wagon.

"It's a Yánkee," explained Corporal Wheeler. "I brung him along so ifn there ain't enough stew to go around some of you can eat him."

"Tomorrow," said Forrest, "I want twenty-five of you to climb trees and stay up and don't come down till you can do as well as Wheeler."

22

Mrs. Dewitt was sweeping the front porch of the Napier house when she heard the first sounds of battle. They were distant two or three miles, but clear in the morning stillness, clear and filled with tragic meaning. She cried out in fright, but after a moment she was herself again. Mrs. Napier came out on the porch and her face was set and grim but not from terror.

"I mustn't let the fire go out in the cookstove," she said quietly, for she was a practical woman. "We must keep that wash kettle full of boiling water all the time. The boys have got plenty of stovewood ready. Mrs. Thedford's upstairs tidying things and gettin' ready."

"Tell me what you want me to do," said Hunter who had come through the hall and stood in the porch door. Her face was chalk-white as if all the blood were drained from it, but her voice was even.

"Make sure that we haven't missed any cot. See that every one has some bandages ready."

Hunter went back into the house and started on the round assigned her.

"We are Presbyterians," said Mrs. Dewitt, "and we believe that everything happens according to purpose. That is more comforting than to believe that things work out by some sort of crazy chance. My husband preached about it the last time I heard him at Fayetteville. It was most comforting then, and it comforts me today to remember it. A lot of terrible things have hap-

pened in this world, but every time some good purpose has come out of it."

"My husband's a religious man too," said Mrs. Napier. "I guess he believes about the same as yours. But me, I don't know. I wonder a lot about war and fightin'. What good do they do? When the war is over, what'll anybody have he couldn't have had more of by just using common sense?"

"Since we're stubborn and won't use our common sense, the Lord punishes us so we'll learn to use it. That's the way it seems to me. There's a man coming."

The man rode up to the gate, dismounted and hitched his horse. He lifted off a pair of saddle pockets and swung them across his arm. He walked up the yard path, bowed courteously to the ladies on the porch. "I am Doctor Stout from General Bragg's staff. I was ordered to come here by him. I presume that one of you ladies is Mrs. Napier."

"I'm Mrs. Napier, Doctor Stout."

"Arrangements, I believe, have already been made to use your house for our wounded. Very likely I'll be coming and going for the next several days."

"Wouldn't you like for me to show you how we've fixed things, Doctor Stout?"

"If you please, Mrs. Napier."

She led him through the house. He was pleased and said that he had never found a place so well prepared for service. Other doctors would arrive presently. Indeed two others were coming up the path while he spoke. Within half an hour they were ready for the ambulances. Each physician had his assignment of cots and his medicines where he could get them with the greatest convenience.

"Soldiers," said Dr. Stout, "are very puzzling people. At times I don't understand them at all. When they're wounded, a field hospital is the last place to which they want to be taken. I've heard them ask God not to let them be taken to one. Here we can't heal a soldier who's fatally wounded, but if there's any doubt about him we can raise the odds in his favor. Here is cleanliness; out there——" His eyes sought the direction of the

angry cannon and his shoulders shrugged in a helpless gesture. "A great many soldiers feel that a field hospital is a torture chamber."

"My two grandbabies are going to help," said Mrs. Thedford. The physician looked at her strangely. "The younger one is going on eleven years old. He'll carry water from the spring. The other is three years older. He'll help somehow."

"Of course," agreed the surgeon. "You spoke of the spring. Would you let me see it?"

She called to Willie, and he went with Dr. Stout to the spring. After a little while they came back, and the doctor said to Mrs. Napier, "It's God's mercy for us to have this house. That's the best spring water I've found this summer. With the water we've had to drink I don't know why there isn't a lot more sickness among the soldiers. It's Divine Providence that keeps them as well as they are."

For a while nothing was said and there was no sound except the swish of Mrs. Dewitt's broom in the back hall and the distant clamor of battle.

Then Dr. Stout spoke again. "They're all worried about this battle. General Forrest said yesterday that it might be bloodier than Shiloh. Though I don't see how it could. I remember Shiloh very well indeed, but the one that wakes me up shivering in the middle of the night is Murfreesboro. I've seen a lot of ghastly things but nothing like what I saw in the Lytle house at Murfreesboro. There weren't ambulances enough to bring in the wounded, so they turned a whole regiment into stretcher-bearers and they carried the wounded a mile and a half. From ten o'clock on we—there were three of us—sawed off arms and legs. It seemed in that battle they either got killed outright or shot in the arm or leg or went untouched. The dead, of course, they left on the field for the burial squads. All day long, now an arm, now a leg, now an arm, now a leg, until I thought I'd go crazy."

"I've heard soldiers talk about it."

"And not a drop of chloroform after one o'clock, and before that only enough to numb a little. We gave the men leather

straps to bite on while we sawed. God keep me from another such time! If I ever saw heroism it was in the Lytle house at Murfreesboro that winter day. I'm a physician and used to terrible things but I still wake up in a cold sweat when I dream about it."

Mrs. Napier said nothing.

The physician continued: "We're luckier here. We have chloroform, fifty times as much as we had at the Lytle house. And where do you think we got it? From the Yankees. General Forrest had a sergeant doing a little spying in Chattanooga. When he got ready to come back he fetched a wagon of medical supplies with him. Wasn't that just like one o' Forrest's men? I don't know yet how he managed it, but he brought along more chloroform than I've seen since I've been practicing medicine. I'm sorry for the Yankees not to have it, but we need it worse than they do. They can get more. We're not likely ever to get much more. By the way, Dr. Cowan is to be in charge here." Dr. Stout bowed courteously, mounted his horse and rode away.

They heard the rattle of an approaching wagon. Mrs. Napier looked out beyond the gate and her hand went to her throat in a gesture of pain. It was one of the crude ambulances improvised for use by the Southern armies. It was bringing in the first fruits of battle. Mrs. Dewitt came out on the porch, and, though her step was steady, her face was as white as the sheets on the waiting cots.

The wagon stopped. The two men on the seat jumped to the ground and moved quickly to the rear of the ambulance. They came through the gate and up the path bringing a soldier on a stretcher. They stopped on the porch while Dr. J. B. Cowan of Forrest's staff looked at the man expertly. "He's not bad hurt. Give him to Dr. Battle in the back room. Tell that lady back there to help if he needs it."

"You mean that, Doc?" The boy wasn't over eighteen and there was pleading in his eyes.

"You're not hurt much, son." Dr. Cowan's words were kindly. "You'll be back with the troops in a few days. Take it easy now. You'll be all right."

On their second trip the stretcher-bearers carried another youth, and at his first glance Dr. Cowan knew that the boy was about gone. He heard a choked exclamation from Mrs. Dewitt, and he turned to her.

"It's Charley the Minstrel," she said. "That's what the men call him. I saw him once when my husband preached. I couldn't ever forget him."

"I've heard about him," said the physician. "Well, if he's a minstrel, I'm afraid he's sung his last lay."

But he was mistaken. They placed the boy on a cot in the front room, and Dr. Cowan sat beside the cot with his fingers on Charley's wrist, and the look in his eyes was grave. They saw the lips move and then they heard the song. It was "Kittie Wells" that Charley was singing.

"I often wish that I was dead,
And laid beside her in the tomb.
The sorrow that bows down my head,
Is silent in the midnight gloom.
The springtime has no charms for me,
Though flowers are blooming in the dells,
For that bright form I do not see,
The form of my sweet Kittie Wells."

The soldier lay still for long minutes. Then his eyes closed, and on his face were peace and contentment. Two miles away on a front that spread fanlike from Reed's Bridge to Alexander's Bridge cannon roared as if in salute.

Jim called to Mrs. Thedford on the back porch. "Grandma, they're fightin' out on the big road acrost the creek, and they need drinkin' water. The water in the creek's not fitten for 'em to drink. I'm a-goin' to haul 'em some from the spring. You don't mind, do you, Grandma? It really ain't far. They need it mighty bad, Grandma."

"All right, but do be careful."

Five minutes later she saw the gaunt horse pull the wagon up the hill from the spring and out the barnyard gate. The boy sat on the seat, his feet proudly resting on the dash, for he wore

shoes. A barrel was in the wagon bed, filled, she knew, with water. Covering it was a folded burlap cloth fitted down with a barrel hoop.

As she watched him leave, two more of the contrived ambulances turned in at the gate. An officer rode by the second one and Mrs. Napier saw that it was General Cheatham. What was he doing here? The first soldier unloaded from this second ambulance was a rather small man, seamed and graying. He was unconscious. Four wounded were carried in. Dr. Cowan came out onto the porch and greeted General Cheatham.

"Doctor," said General Cheatham in his bluff voice, "that's one of the best men in my army. Take care of everybody, but this soldier is special. He's one man we couldn't run the army without."

"Of course he is. I know him. Best man with horses ever in Middle Tennessee. He didn't look too bad off to me. I'll go take a closer look."

"Could I have a drink of water, ma'am?" General Cheatham asked of Mrs. Napier. "This is mighty thirsty weather."

Mrs. Napier brought a dipper of water to General Cheatham. While he stood drinking and talking with her, the doctor came out. "You'll have your wagonman back in three or four hours, General. What happened to him?"

"I didn't see it but those who did told me that a cannon ball hit the wagon bed and knocked a plank against his head. He looked just about dead to me."

"Well, he's not hurt much. Skull's not cracked, no fever; nothing much is the matter except he had his senses knocked out. We'll take care of him and get him back to you within a few hours."

"It's worth the trip to hear that news."

Mrs. Dewitt came out the door. "I thought I heard you out here, General Cheatham. How is my husband?"

"Why, bless my soul if it isn't Sister Dewitt! The Reverend is all right. Just as fat as any splinter and as limber as any willow sprout. Only I hear that horsefies have taken to disturbing public worship when he preaches."

"So you heard about that, General Cheatham?"

He laughed heartily. "As I heard it, if it hadn't been for my driver we wouldn't have any chaplain. They say that horsefly was getting ready to do away with him. Did you know my driver is the man I brought here?"

"No, I didn't know——"

"Well, he is. He's in there." He pointed. "The good doctor says he isn't bad hurt, but you take care of him. He's one man I can't afford to lose. Good morning, ma'am."

He started to leave. Before he reached his horse a courier came riding in a gallop. The general called to him, "What's the news?"

"General Polk said tell you that General Longstreet has reached Ringgold and should be here by late afternoon. He has five brigades, ordered to get ready for immediate action."

"Very well. Do you know where General Hood is?"

"His troops are west of Alexander's Bridge, sir."

"Never mind. I suppose General Bragg will adjust matters with a general order. Still, I'd like to see Hood. Any fresh bulletins from the fighting?"

"They pushed General Forrest back about a mile but he's holding now. There's fighting all along the lines."

"I'll ride back with you."

23

Mrs. Dewitt sat by the driver's cot and fanned away the buzzing flies. He was breathing easily and showed signs of returning to consciousness. Mrs. Napier came to the door and called Mrs. Dewitt out of the room to help Dr. Morton dress a wound. When she returned the driver's eyes were open. He looked at her intently.

"Howdy, ma'am. Any votes agin me bein' still alive and kickin'?"

She smiled. "Vote *for* is carried unanimously, as they say at the church meetings back at Fayetteville."

"Might I ask, ma'am, jes where I am?" He looked about him. "Why, I think I know already."

"Of course you do. You brought the hams here. You're at

Mrs. Napier's house. They're using it for a field hospital. You knew about that. Guess who came with you."

"A cannon ball was the last thing I was a-lookin' for. Did it knock somebody else skygogglin' too. Was it College Grove, ma'am?"

"No one else was hurt. General Cheatham came along with you. You'd better get well right away. If you don't, I'm afraid he's going to blame me. He talked as though he would."

"He's got no right to do that, ma'am. I done been well five minutes. Did he tell you how it happened, ma'am?"

"A cannon ball knocked a plank against your head. . . . Take it easy. You'll be back with General Cheatham before night. That's what Doctor Cowan says."

Hunter went by the door and Mrs. Dewitt called to her to come in. "Here's one of General Cheatham's stand-bys. The general helped bring him here. Come in and get acquainted with him."

Mrs. Dewitt introduced them almost formally.

"Why, I know of him," Hunter said excitedly. "A friend of mine has told me——" She stopped, blushing.

"Your friend doubtless has been christened," said Mrs. Napier dryly.

"He's Lieutenant Beasley Nichol."

"I know him same as a brother," said the driver. "Him and me fit the Yankees together back in Nashville. He ever tell you about the time the Yankees locked us in one of their wagons and drove off out the Murfreesboro Pike? That was right excitin'."

"Oh, I'd like to hear about it."

"We shore put the comeuppance on 'em. Yes sir, that feller is as smart as a tack."

"If you feel like it tell me something about him. Tell me anything. I know so little and I long to know everything. I can be spared a little while."

While he was telling her the ambulances came again. The cannon sounded nearer, and the crackle of musketry deeper and

more continuous. The smell of gunpowder was heavy on the air. The battle was drawing closer. The ramshackle wagon rumbled back for more drinking water.

Jim came to the back porch and called softly to his grandmother. "Is there another barrel? They's a place I could leave one and keep on a-haulin'. They mighty thirsty for drinkin' water. It's a ter'ble big battle, Grandma."

"You'll find a tub in the shed. I'm sure Mrs. Napier wouldn't mind. Pour the black-eyed peas somewhere and use it."

One of the wounded soldiers was groaning. She went back into the house.

"His leg has to come off," Dr. Morton said. "There is nothing else to do. He'd have blood poison before midnight, and then it would be too late. This won't be too hard. Thank God for that chloroform!"

Hunter heard what was said and came out of the room in which the driver lay. "I'll help you," she said to Dr. Morton.

Mrs. Napier walked quickly down the hall. "No, my dear, you aren't ready for it yet. You take my place. I'll stay with Dr. Morton."

Hunter's head was high. "I really need to do something. I'll help."

When the ambulance left on the return trip the driver went back with it to General Cheatham's wagons.

24

The first day's battle was, in the main, compounded of tentative advances and retreats, of feinting for advantage or sometimes of following a mere expediency. Throughout the nineteenth the right and center of the Confederate lines were threatened, but always the climax was averted. In the late afternoon Cleburne's division, led in person by the fiery Arkansan, crossed the Chickamauga at Thedford's Ford. At sunset his whole front, extending from Jay's Sawmill to the Lafayette Road, moved forward through open woods on a gradual slope.

The evening had grown strangely quiet. There was still rose

in the sky where the sun had fallen behind the western mountains. In and out among the trees, steadily, unwaveringly, advanced Wood's Alabamians and Mississippians; Deshler's Texans and Arkansans; Lucius Polk's Tennesseans, most of them veterans of Shiloh, all of them veterans of Murfreesboro. Still there was no sound except the measured *tramp, tramp* of the soldiers on the parched ground, the thud of the horses' hoofs and the crunch of artillery wheels as Hotchkiss' artillery kept pace with the men.

Then fire blazed on a long front ahead of them and a hail of bullets fell in the woods about them.

"Hold your positions till we can put the artillery closer" was the order.

For thirty minutes the place was an antiphony of musketry until Hotchkiss got the artillery stationed in a cleared area less than a hundred yards from the improvised breastwork of the Northern troops. With a roar the cannon went into action, a roar that rocked the trees among which the soldiers were standing. The gunners couldn't see the breastworks in the dark, but they knew where they were and their aim was deadly. At the same time Polk's Tennesseans plunged forward with bayonets drawn. It was more than the Yankees could stand, and they retired, not at a run, but in a trot that covered a mile and a half in less than an hour. After them dashed Cleburne's men, but the night was dark and the ground was rough. So a halt was called, and there the men bivouacked for the night, slept beneath the stars and waited for the morrow.

25

In the afternoon of the nineteenth General Rosecrans had moved his headquarters from the Lee House at the Crawfish Spring to the Widow Glenn's three miles farther north, just south of the series of hills they called Horseshoe Ridge. There, at eight o'clock, he held a conference with his corps commanders. One lantern burned uncertainly on the table at which the commanding general sat, and another on a wall shelf. A telegraph

wire had been run into the house not an hour before and the key put on a little table by the fireplace. A telegrapher slowly tapped off a message. He would use his key for a while then stop to look curiously at the generals gathered in the room.

General Rosecrans sat at a large table and alternately studied with intentness a sketched map on the table before him, and then a sheet filled with figures, obviously the strength of his various units. All the time he drummed nervously on the table with his fingers. He looked tired and wan, and his sad eyes expressed a sort of pleading, as if he yearned for reassurance. General Thomas sat erect in his chair and slept soundly. He was a massive man of great strength but he was exhausted by the three days and nights during which he had had no sleep at all. General McCook watched him with amused tolerance and hummed in low tones a tune popular with his troops, "The Hebrew Maiden." He had been without sleep only one night. General Crittenden never took his eyes from General Rosecrans' face. At the end of the table to the left sat Charles A. Dana, Assistant Secretary of War, sent down by Stanton to observe conditions in the West.

General Rosecrans stopped tapping the table and looked up from the papers. "Mr. Dana, are you meeting with full co-operation? Are you seeing what you wished to see?" His voice was thin and tired.

"Yes, General Rosecrans, I suppose I'm getting full co-operation, but I'm not seeing quite what I'd hoped to see."

"One rarely does in war. That's been my experience. But, sir, we covet your counsel. We naturally wish to conform in all matters to the Department's plans. Could you be somewhat more explicit?"

"Of course, General. Your loyalty to the Department is well known. The lack to which I referred is in neither soldiers nor supplies, nor in the capacity of leadership. All of these you seem to have. But are you a tightly knit army? Aren't you four armies instead of one? The question is not original with me. It has been asked before."

"Mr. Dana, we trust the individuality of our corps command-

ers. To this moment not one has been grudging in following my orders. If the gaps between us sometime seem wide, I'm afraid the fault is mine."

"It may turn out a strength instead of a weakness. Sometimes that happens. We shall likely learn which it is tomorrow. What do you consider the enemy's strength? Secretary Stanton wishes your estimate."

"Seventy thousand, according to my most dependable reports. It might be somewhat greater, or it might be somewhat less."

"And yours?"

General Rosecrans turned his eyes to General James A. Garfield, Chief of Staff. "You can answer that more precisely than I can."

Garfield's voice had the rich quality of a tolling bell. "Fifty-nine thousand, sir. I think your estimate of the Rebels too high. I'd say not over fifty-eight thousand, conceivably not over fifty-five."

"I had not reached my figure lightly, but I pray God yours is right!" General Rosecrans crossed himself reverently.

"The important question, as I see it, is whether you're ready to continue the battle tomorrow," said Dana. "Are you prepared for the final test?"

"Is one ever ready for battle?" asked Rosecrans in his wan sad voice. "What would you say, General Thomas?"

The massive man came out of his deep sleep, instantly wide-awake. "Strengthen the right," he said sonorously.

"Strengthen the right? By all means, but what with? We're too thin now."

"The right is our danger spot," said Crittenden. His eyes were on General Thomas who was sleeping again. Crittenden looked at McCook in mild reproof. He was still humming the song.

"One has to consider the whole army. The placement of the enemy requires us to spread our troops over a front of five miles, and every spot is potentially dangerous."

"There's a matter I'd like to bring to your notice, General Rosecrans," said General Crittenden.

"Certainly, sir."

"The troops are suffering from thirst. It has been very bad in some places today. The country is almost destitute of water except the creek, and the men revolt against that. The pools are stagnant. We should make some provision for tomorrow."

"Very well, I shall direct General Mitchell to detail a regiment of cavalry to bring water along the line in buckets. The soldiers must have water." Rosecrans nodded to his orderly. "Make a note of it. And now, gentlemen, I know that you are exhausted. I shall be as brief as I can and let you go. General Thomas, I wish you to maintain your present line, with Brannan held in reserve——"

General Thomas opened his eyes, alert again. "Yes, General Rosecrans," he said in his deep rumble.

"General McCook, hold your picket line in position as long as you can. When you can hold it no longer close on General Thomas' right and cover the position of this house. General Crittenden, please keep two divisions in reserve back of and between Thomas and McCook, ready to swing to the support of either when the need arises. Is that understood? Both of you keep a close watch on General Forrest."

"Yes, General Rosecrans," answered McCook and Crittenden in unison.

"The Rebel Forrest has become quite a myth in Washington," observed Dana. "Really he keeps Washington nervous. Does his genius warrant that? Is there any unexpected devilment he could do tomorrow?"

It was surprisingly the telegraph operator who answered. "Listen to this!" he cried with an odd lack of formality, for he was new to army life. "Listen to this, all of you! It just came.

"Detachment believed to be from the Rebel Forrest's command just destroyed bridge at Lightfoot's Mill. Entire supply train wrecked. The bridge wreckers escaped, but are being pursued."

For seconds that seemed to stretch into minutes no one said a word; each sat looking incredulously at his neighbor.

"That answers you, sir," Rosecrans said to Dana. He turned to the telegraph operator. "Exactly when did this happen?"

"I'll ask the operator at Chattanooga, General Rosecrans." Moments of tapping and waiting ensued. Then the operator turned from his key and said, "Why, that's funny. It was before midnight last night. Some mixup occurred because we moved the wire out here, and the message got misplaced."

"Last night! This is intolerable."

"Why, may I inquire, was a bridge so important not properly guarded?" Dana asked.

"I want to know that myself. I shall make inquiry at once." The general stood with such suddenness that his chair rattled. "This alters matters—decidedly. We will need what that train was bringing, and what other trains would have brought. I don't know what we'll do without the bridge. Forrest's score is rising too fast." He struck the table with his fist, and said in his reedy voice, "Get word to the wagon depot in Chattanooga that they must send us twice as much by wagon as they have been doing. It means rest for neither wagonmen nor horses for the next twenty-four hours. Tell them that. Tell them I said *twice as much*. Stress that. I knew something was wrong. Why haven't I heard of this before? Tell them to start now with twice as much."

"Right away, General."

The keys clicked furiously. General Rosecrans was drumming again on the table, his eyes lifted above those who sat in the room.

26

About the middle of the afternoon a strange sight steamed from the south into the station at Ringgold. It was the arrival of the rickety trains bringing the final contingent of General James Longstreet's corps from Virginia to the aid of Bragg's harassed army. The ancient and tumble-down cars had clanked, jerked and rattled for four long days on their westward journey. Some soldiers were inside the cars; some in daredevil fashion

clung to the sides; a majority stood or sat on the top. All were thirsty and hungry and incredibly dirty. Almost all were heavily bearded. All were eager for battle.

There was much haste in unloading. If time had permitted, little ramps would have been improvised to ease the horses to the ground. But haste was imperative. The horses in true spirit leaped from the car door to the ground, and not one suffered mishap.

General Longstreet and two members of his staff, Manning and Sorrel, mounted and rode away on the Reed's Bridge Road. It ran toward the low thunder that rumbled in the west, a thunder the soldiers who were forming in the railroad yard at Ringgold knew well. They had heard it at Chancellorsville, at Antietam, at Gettysburg. It was a sort of thunder that was built into their lives. They would be traveling the road to it as soon as unloading could be finished. The fact that they had lived for four days on blue Florida beef and cold corn bread was nothing when that thunder called to them.

"General Bragg knew we were coming. Wouldn't you have thought he'd have somebody to meet us?" General Longstreet asked as they dashed along. "This seems odd to me."

"I've heard that General Bragg is very absent-minded at times." Colonel Moxley Sorrel smiled wryly.

Longstreet's practical eye swept the country. "What's the matter here? This is a desert. You couldn't keep an army alive on it."

The three galloped another mile. "Colonel Sorrel, are you hungry?"

"I'm not finicky any more, General Longstreet. Show me something to eat and I'll eat it."

"That's a good middle-class house yonder. We might find something to eat there. I'm losing my finickiness, too."

Longstreet and Sorrel went up to the house, while Manning waited on guard outside. An old woman answered their rap on the door. She was clean, and the house within, as far as they could see, was clean too.

"Madam—" Colonel Sorrel made his most courtly Virginia

bow—"this officer is General Longstreet and I'm a member of his staff. Would it be possible for us to get something to eat—for pay, of course?"

"Not for pay if that man is General Longstreet. I got a grand-baby fightin' with him."

"A grandbaby?"

"Oh, he's twenty. Name's Eb Cameron. If he's around he'll be in to see me. I cooked a ham yesterday. If the Yankees are coming like folks say, we just as well eat what we got. I haven't got a bite of bread cooked, but if you can eat ham without it you're welcome. I just churned and I got plenty of buttermilk."

They ate ham without bread and drank buttermilk. General Longstreet smacked his lips with gusto and said, "Even in Virginia I have not tasted such ham."

"Nor have I anywhere tasted buttermilk as refreshing as this," said Sorrel.

Captain Manning came hurrying in to say that a dozen Yankee soldiers were riding swiftly across the field.

"That's odd. We were told—— I'll take the slice with me, madam. Perfectly delicious!"

They ran down the walk and sprang onto their horses. The Yankees were less than a hundred yards away. A bullet whizzed past them.

"These horses are stove-up from the train ride. We got a better chance in the woods," said the general.

The horses cleared the low fence into the timber. The enemy, fearing an ambush, did not follow.

"General Longstreet and two members of his staff captured on arrival in the West. A lovely bulletin for Jefferson Davis," said Sorrel with irony. "What's that?"

A volley came from behind the Yankees. Sorrel glanced back over his shoulder. "We're saved," he announced. "It's Johnny Rebs."

The Yankees galloped headlong out the road, having now become the pursued. General Longstreet and his party turned and rode to meet the oncoming Rebel horsemen. Their leader recognized Longstreet.

"Good afternoon and welcome, General. I'm Captain Hume Crockett of General Forrest's command. The general asked us to present his compliments, to mention his pleasure in your arrival and to offer any assistance we can give. We expected to meet you at the railroad, but you arrived a bit earlier than we had counted on."

"You couldn't have timed our meeting better, Captain Crockett. Those bluecoats might have become annoying. Our gratitude to you—" he included the eight men in his gesture—"and to General Forrest for a very timely rescue. What were those Yankees doing here? We were told quite definitely that this section was free of them."

"Some scouts spying on us, I fancy. They're unusually active today."

"Well, I'm glad you are, too. Good heavens, what heat! How's the battle going?"

"Nothing certain, sir. Sparring for tomorrow."

"Could you help me find General Bragg?"

"I don't know where he is, but we'll find him."

But they didn't find him till late that night. Bragg was sleeping soundly in an ambulance near Alexander's Bridge. He was awakened and told that General Longstreet had arrived.

"What time is it?"

"Eleven o'clock, sir."

The commanding general knew that Longstreet had reached Ringgold at three, but he was so little concerned that eight hours had elapsed without his making any effort whatever to see his distinguished ally. "Please tell General Longstreet that I'll be with him in five minutes."

The group waited in the dark. Bragg came toward them, his shoes squeaking on the hard ground. "I hope you're well, General Longstreet."

"Oh, yes, quite well, sir," Longstreet said with bluff heartiness. "Glad to see you, General Bragg. My compliments, sir. May I present to you my staff?"

General Bragg bowed stiffly in acknowledgment. "Where are your troops, General Longstreet?"

"Those under General Hood have been with you since yesterday."

"I know about them, of course. But those who accompanied you?"

"I've not been in touch with them since I left the railroad. They were to start immediately. I imagine they've arrived by now. At any rate they were directed to come promptly. They will conform to your plan, General."

Bragg called an orderly and asked for a table and a lantern. The table was placed by a log. The two generals sat down on it, studied a map and made plans for the next day. The battle was to begin at daylight. Longstreet was to command the left. With his entire command, the troops he had brought from Virginia and some improvised groups added to him, he was to sweep forward as soon as it was light enough to move among the pines and hurl his force against the Northern right. Sunrise would find the entire Army of Tennessee at the throats of the enemy.

During the hour that he talked with Longstreet, Bragg never uttered a syllable that suggested the slightest doubt of the victorious outcome on the morrow. Something infinitely subtle conveyed to Longstreet that the commanding general was haunted by fear. Something vital had been neglected. The ruthless flight of time had caught him unprepared in some quarter. Or, perhaps most likely of all, Bragg had not found the power to resolve the struggle waged on the battlefield of his own spirit.

The moon was riding above the rim of the western mountain when Longstreet lay down beneath a cedar tree and straightway went to sleep, dreaming of Virginian meadows and of General Robert E. Lee.

27

At Mrs. Napier's that night the ambulances were still coming at ten o'clock. Mrs. Thedford's grandson was still hauling water from the spring to the soldiers. The gaunt horse had been fed at sundown and the boy had eaten only a little. On his last trip his

grandmother had gone to the gate and asked him to quit for the night. It would make him the better able to haul the next day, she told him.

"But, Grandma, they want it now. Some o' them can't sleep without it. It's the first good drinkin' water they've had in a month."

She had gone sadly back into the house.

The God of Battles was kind that Saturday, for of all those who came by ambulance to Mrs. Napier's only a few were in great distress. One had been Charley the Minstrel; another Sergeant Goforth; another the soldier with the amputated leg. Mrs. Napier had saved the severed leg and labeled it. "If he gets better, we'll bury it by itself. If he doesn't, we'll bury it with the rest of him," she said.


Most of the wounds had been so slight that the soldiers had returned to the field after they were dressed. There were always newcomers with a flesh wound in the shoulder or arm or leg; one had a rib cracked by a spent bullet; a few were pinked in close fighting with bayonets; one had been stunned when his horse fell upon him. Five were brought for sunstroke. The ambulance drivers fetched several for reasons outside of battle. Two had the cramps from eating too many green persimmons snatched from the ground while advancing on the enemy; one had been bitten on the ankle by a snake. The triviality of these troubles were annoying to ambulance men who took their work seriously.

"What's the war comin' to?" one inquired indignantly, "when you can't find a feller to haul to the horspital who's wuss off than if he jes stumped a toe?"

"How many was it we took back the last time? Five, wasn't it? That's jes a-wastin' time. Bring 'em in, take 'em back! Piddlin', I call it."

"What I say is, tomorrow we don't haul a single one that's got a chance to live. If all they want's a ride, give 'em a broomstick. This wagon ain't for no picnics."

"Snake bite! The way I heard it, Ginral Lee fines his men a month's pay for gittin' bit by a snake. Got to learn to dodge in his ahmy. Snake bite!"



"Don't ricollect haulin' this many puny cases long as I been drivin' this shebang."

"And takin' 'em back to the ahmy the next trip!"

"That man Ginral Forrest sent, I reckon he musta been wuth bringin'."

"Musta been, the order the ginral give. Bed don't stand for no shenanigan."

"Must be sumpin special."

"One thing is fer shore—one more trip's all I'm a-goin' to make tonight. You can't tell; them Yanks mebbe jes been practicing today. They're liable to start shootin' tomorrer. I needs my sleep."

"Bit by a snake!" said his companion in great disgust.

28

Beasley Nichol rode to the Napier house late in the afternoon of the nineteenth. He and Hunter Cragwall sat down by the cot on which Sergeant Goforth lay. The sergeant was delirious. Nichol knew that his babbling, in part, had to do with their older exploits together. At times he was in jail at Nashville. He would call to the Fiddlin' Man and tell him what tune to play. Sometimes he was blacksmithing at Manchester and commanding the mule he was shoeing to be still. Again in hoarse tones he would yell some orders about a bridge he was trying to destroy.

Dr. Cowan came at intervals as frequent as he could make them. He knew Goforth and Nichol well and liked them. He knew their worth to General Forrest. He laid a finger on the sergeant's pulse and studied the swarthy face in the candle's flickering light.

"We haven't had a bad day," the physician said irrelevantly. "Many of the wounded have already reported back to the army. An easy day compared with some I've lived through, God knows how!"

"How's the sergeant, Doctor?" asked Nichol.

"To be truthful, I don't know. If he were less rugged I think I'd know. Human life is a queer commodity. Sometimes it moves

by routine, and we can tell beforehand what will happen; then again it refuses to follow the plans we have made for it, to follow any plans we know. At Murfreesboro a lad had his arm shot away, besides five bullet wounds in his body, not one of them trivial. They brought him all mangled to the Lytle house. I gave him an hour to live. What do you think he is tonight? The hardest-riding, savagest-fighting man with Forrest. Not a day goes by without the mystery of life leaving me either depressed or inspired—mostly the latter. Even if the sergeant here proceeds by the rules, it's too early to tell about him. Tomorrow perhaps I can. There might be blood poisoning, and it could take him in two hours. There might be other things—a splintered skull for instance. If it isn't asking too much, one of you might stay with him all night."

"I'll stay of course," said Nichol. "Is there anything I should do?"

"Nothing except call me if . . . if he gets worse. I'll try to get a little sleep. I'm an old man and need it every now and then. His wound is in as good condition as I know how to get it. I'll be on the back porch, and I can be awakened easily. Good night."

The woman and the man sat on at the cotside. At times they looked at the man who lay there, but mainly at each other.

"Your eyes are the trysting place of dreams," he said.

"I dream of home at twilight and you with me, and the smell of honeysuckle on the air."

"And peace again."

"And peace; no needless wounding, maiming and killing. Just home and you and life in a friendly world."

For a while no word was spoken. Then he said, "I've the feeling that the sergeant will not die. I don't know how I'd do without him. All through the war he's been with me, and when he's been away from me, he's been with Crockett. And Crockett will say, as I say, that he's the best man of the three."

She said nothing but laid her hand on his arm.

"I think General Forrest knows that without the sergeant neither of us would be worth much to him. I have the feeling he'll not die," Nichol repeated.

"You go to sleep," she said. "I slept last night. I haven't the slightest need for sleep and you have. When did you sleep last?"

He ignored her question. "Some men grow tiresome; in fact it takes deep friendship to keep anyone from becoming so. The sergeant has been interesting to me every minute I've been with him. He handles grammar as if he thought it were something fixed up by Yankees, but what he says is always exciting. Nothing ever surprises him. He always anticipates it. If he should come to right now and we'd tell him we had defeated the enemy today, he'd say, 'I thought we would.' If he found out he was badly wounded, he'd say he had suspected it all the time. You go to sleep. I'll call you just as soon as I get sleepy."

"Then I'll stay too. That's the way we should be—together—isn't it?"

"Later, in the time you dreamed of. But this is different. There are a great many things to be thought of now, my dear."

"Then you go to sleep. I'll call you."

"I must have my way this time. I'm used to this. It's my time to give orders. Later, you can, but not now. Up you get, and out."

She went, kissing him tenderly on the forehead as she did.

He sat by the cot and watched the face of his friend in the splotted light of the lantern. The sergeant's breathing was heavy as of one drugged. Goforth stirred convulsively as if to sit up, then sank back and shouted, "There they are, yonder on Union Street! Shoot 'em!" He struggled to get off the cot, but Nichol's arm pressed him back, and Nichol's gentle voice quieted, reassured, commanded. The sergeant gradually relaxed and soon was sleeping again, his breathing uneven, hoarse, but regular.

The night moved slowly on. Nichol had no desire to sleep. He sat and recalled the events through which he had lived with Crockett and the sergeant. The war would end their comradeship. Their exploits would live only in memory. Perhaps the sergeant would return to his blacksmith shop at Manchester. Crockett would work again in the bank at Franklin. But Nichol would go back to Edwin Forrest the day war was over, and he'd take Hunter with him. The stage had always beckoned to him.

Fortune had smiled upon him, for immediately after his graduation from Princeton Edwin Forrest had taken him into his company. Ah, Forrest! Edwin then, Bedford now. And each without peer! Edwin Forrest had told him to come as soon as he was free again. And once again he would hear the matchless voice speaking the matchless words:

*To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time....*

How lovely was the theater, how lovely were the lines the actors spoke and the parts they played, how lovely it would be to have Hunter present when he acted!

The clock was striking midnight. He could see through the window that the moonlight was falling slantingly on the yard. The night was mild and silent. In the next room the soldier who had lost his leg was restless, but the morphine would hold him asleep for hours yet. At intervals he would cry out. The other soldiers apparently were sleeping. Mrs. Napier, who seemed never to sleep, would come into the room, stand for a moment and go out silently on her rounds. Hunter was asleep. He would have heard her slightest move, but she made none. The doctors were sleeping too, but with catlike lightness. Nichol could hear a bird chirruping in an ash tree in the yard, but its notes were so casual and colorless that he could not identify it. So still was the night that he could hear as if it were a dozen feet away the careless stamp of the gaunt horse in the barn.

Suddenly he knew that Goforth was worse. A strange quality had come into his comrade's breathing. A film of sweat was on his brow. He ran to the back porch and touched Dr. Cowan on the arm.

The physician awoke instantly. "What is it?"

"The sergeant. Please come."

Dr. Cowan was wide-awake by then. He led the way through the hall and into the room. He dropped down on the chair by the cot and laid his ear to Goforth's heart. He sat rigid for a moment, thinking, then said to Mrs. Napier, who a moment be-

fore had come into the room, "Could you make me a mustard plaster?"

"I've made a thousand." She started to the kitchen and Hunter, who had joined them, went with her. The water in the kettle was hot. It had been kept hot since morning. Mrs. Napier took down her jar of powdered mustard seed. She poured the mustard liberally into a crockery bowl, added hot water and stirred vigorously with a spoon. Then she spread the mixture on a strip of cloth which she folded over.

"Make another, Miss Cragwall," said Mrs. Napier and hurried back to Dr. Cowan.

He took the poultice and placed it on Goforth's chest. "It's to pull his blood away from the brain. There's too much there."

Hunter came with the second plaster and the doctor placed it near the first. They sat and watched the stricken man. Ten minutes, twenty, thirty passed and the sergeant was snoring.

"It worked," said Dr. Cowan. "It has worked for me before. Take the plasters off and keep them warm. We may need them again. I must have more sleep."

"It's your turn to sleep," Hunter said to Beasley, "and I'm not leaving this time. You go to sleep——"

"No——"

"Yes. You don't know what you'll have to do tomorrow. I'll call you if there's any change."

29

When a few hours later Nichol opened his eyes the freshness of a new day was upon the world.

Ten minutes later, a messenger from General Forrest came in a gallop to the Napier house asking for word of Sergeant Goforth and saying that if Lieutenant Beasley Nichol could be spared at all the general needed him.

Saturday had been but prelude to Sunday. The sharply localized and desultory nineteenth of September made way for the nation's greatest prodigality in blood on the twentieth. The deep-

mouthed cannon had thundered at intervals on Saturday; on Sunday they became the devil's chorus. On Saturday muskets had played a sort of scattered obbligato, now here, now there, but there were always zones of quiet and inaction; on Sunday they swept all the countryside with leaden hail. On Saturday a few had shouted in the performance of duty; on Sunday shouting became the universal passion. On Saturday the fighting had been brisk and determined but not vicious; the next day all the savagery of human nature was unleashed. It was as if man's inclination to destroy, having been restrained too long, suddenly broke loose in one vast orgy.

Everything seemed to go wrong with the Confederates that Sabbath morning. The order very specifically had been to advance at dawn. The assault was to start on the right and spread quickly along the entire front. Promptness was imperative, for the enemy was known to be improving his position with all speed. All night long the ring of axes had been crisp, clear and continuous. At sunrise the axes were still echoing against Missionary Ridge behind them. That meant that each moment of delay made the abatis the more impenetrable.

General Bragg and his staff rode out when the dawn was breaking. On a little eminence northwest of Alexander's Bridge they waited for the first sounds of the assault. They heard nothing but the sounds of axes.

"Most unfortunate," said General Bragg. "Most unfortunate, indeed. What can be the cause of the delay?"

"Some slight interruption," Major Lee answered soothingly. "Any moment now, sir."

But there was no noise of movement, nothing but the grim chopping. The sun came up above the hills.

"What can it be? We're an hour late already." Only the beat of axes against the morning calm answered him. For minutes nothing else was said in the group huddled on horseback on the brow of the little Chickamauga hill. The tension was too great for speech.

Finally Bragg broke out in as loud a voice as his staff had heard him use. "General Polk shall answer for this insufferable delay. Find him, Major Lee. Tell him that I demand action—and an explanation, too."

The officer rode away rapidly. General Polk was not with his troops. Major Lee rode with increased speed across Alexander's Bridge to the spot where General Polk was reported. He found him standing by his horse, holding the reins gracefully in his hand. Lee delivered the message. The magnificently formed Louisianian turned a bit more toward Lee.

"Please say to General Bragg—" he spoke in tones more of the preacher than the warrior—"that I had supposed the advance to be in progress an hour ago. It was ordered exactly according to his plan. I shall go see what is the matter."

Major Lee returned to the little hill. Bragg was no longer there. Outraged by the delay, he had ridden to the right to order the troops into the charge himself. He encountered Breckinridge's division first. Bragg's practiced eye saw that they were not ready for battle.

"Summon General Polk!" he shouted. "I must get at the truth of this."

At that moment Polk came galloping into the presence of the commanding general.

"Why, sir, has the assault not been made?"

"The delay, General Bragg, is regrettable indeed. Through some confusion General Hill who was to initiate the attack did not get the order."

"Need I remind you that orders are issued to be delivered, General Polk?"

"Very true—and for another matter our supply wagons most unaccountably became lost during the night. The men have not eaten their rations."

"Did you say lost! Who lost them? Find out and start the attack, breakfast or no breakfast."

General Polk saluted and rode away. In the moment of silence that ensued the faraway tapping of axes rang in General Bragg's ears like the drumbeats of doom.

In the early morning Chaplain Dewitt took advantage of the unexpected inaction to ride to Mrs. Napier's to greet his wife. They stood in the yard and talked. He had heard of Sergeant Goforth's wound and asked about him. The episode of the wrecked bridge had become the talk of the army. The chaplain didn't know Goforth personally but had heard much about him; in fact, the sergeant's prowess seemed to be growing into a myth. The driver had told him a great deal about Goforth, all of it favorable. Furthermore, he knew that General Forrest considered him one of the most doughty and serviceable men of his army.

"How are things with you?" his wife inquired.

"If the good Lord had made me healthier, I'd just naturally live too long. Anything over a hundred and twenty years is too long. After that a man is liable to be too much trouble to his wife."

"All right," she said smiling. "We'll fix it at a hundred and nineteen, and that isn't old enough to trouble anybody. But in your eyes, behind your pleasant smile, there's something that means you're troubled. I doubt if you could keep much hidden from me except details. You shouldn't ever try. What is it, dear?"

"It's the army," he said soberly. "There's a lot of confusion this morning, too much of it. General Bragg ordered an attack for daylight. He ordered it as emphatically as he can ever order anything. It hasn't begun yet, and the whole army is in a bad state of mind."

"I wondered why everything was so quiet."

"Well, that's it. General Cheatham had his men out by the first light, long before the sun was up. The soldiers waited and waited, and when I left they were still waiting and all mad."

"What stopped them?"

"Nobody knows—or at any rate I haven't heard of anybody who does. We started once but found General Stewart ahead of

us, and since he wasn't moving we stopped—and we're still there."

Mrs. Napier came out to the yard to ask if Dr. Dewitt would like some breakfast.

"Sister Napier, I'll give you a full and complete answer by saying that I'm a preacher of the gospel."

"And this is your day for prayer and fasting?"

"I've usually eaten with great heartiness on the Lord's day, Sister Napier."

"The Lord's day? So it is! We've been so busy I'd forgotten it. I'll fetch you something. Your wife has proved a ministering angel, Dr. Dewitt."

"Two ministering angels under one roof——"

"More than that. Miss Cragwall sat up a good part of the night with the sergeant. She's a remarkable woman, Dr. Dewitt. She and the lieutenant from General Forrest are sweethearts. Isn't that fine?"

"Fine, indeed. But, sister, if my memory is not at fault, you mentioned food——"

She smiled and went hurrying to the kitchen. Dr. Dewitt and his wife talked of the congregation at Fayetteville that were praying for happier days when their church bell would ring out loud and clear on Sunday mornings, and Dr. Dewitt himself, standing tall and straight and thin in the pulpit, would again proclaim the gospel they loved.

As the preacher sat eating, the earth suddenly shook with thunder. The long-delayed assault had begun at last!

Chaplain Dewitt arose in haste. "I must go. God be my helper this day! His ministering angels also will stand in need of help before the sun has set."

In the kitchen water boiled continuously on the stove and food was always ready. Willie Thedford carried water for drinking, for cooking, for the bathing of wounds and bodies. Jim,

who had slept from midnight till daybreak, was hauling water with his dilapidated wagon and gaunt horse from the Blue Spring to soldiers made thirsty by the heat of the sun and of battle. A wagon drove into the open gate. It brought no wounded, for the battle was too young. General Cheatham was sending to the Napier house supplies of medicine and food.

"Look there," said Dr. Cowan with a grim smile. "Look at that soap. I haven't seen so much in a year. It's good soap too. I make a guess General Forrest's raiders have been active, and in the right place. Some Yankees will go unwashed today."

"I speak reverently when I say that man must sometimes be a puzzle to God Almighty. Here am I who preach the gospel and believe every sentence of Holy Writ, including the Eighth Commandment, rejoicing greatly in my heart because my comrades have stolen soap from the Yankees."

"I'll rejoice for the soap and let you work out the rest of it, Brother Dewitt."

"Has the sergeant come to, Doctor?"

"No, not yet."

"What are the prospects?"

"No doubt his skull is cracked from the bullet. If that's all, he'll get well. If there are bone splinters it's another matter, a very serious matter. If there are, they'll show up soon. From that—" the physician gestured toward the uproar of battle—"we'll have a hard day of it."

"By the sound of that," said the preacher, "I, too, will be hard pressed, too hard unless the mercy of God upholds me. I haven't a sheltered post. It is you and I who taste the bitter fruits of war. It is my custom when the soldiers have quitted the battlefield to go out among the wounded and give water to those who thirst, to give what comfort I can to those who need comfort, to pray for those who need prayer. What you do for their bodies, Dr. Cowan, I try to do for their souls."

"I hope, Brother Dewitt, you are never as helpless as I sometimes feel."

"There come times when my helplessness leaves me wretched for days."

Came a clatter of hoofbeats and the crack of firearms. The drama of war was played for the next half minute before their eyes. Four men in blue rode desperately across the open field before them, hotly pursued at an interval of a hundred yards by ten or eleven horsemen in gray.

"Some Yankee scouting party that got over too far," said Dr. Cowan.

The only thing for the four to do was to clear the fence that blocked their way. Three horses soared over it with ease and lightness, but the forelegs of the fourth caught in the top rail and horse and rider went down in a heap. The other three rode swiftly away toward Yankee territory. By the time the pursuers came up, the fallen horse, apparently unhurt, had struggled to its feet.

One of the Southern soldiers caught it by the bridle. A horse was a horse and sorely needed by Bragg's army. They turned and rode rapidly back the way they had come, leading the horse with them.

The soldier lay on the ground, ominously still. The physician's gaze met the minister's.

"Let's go get him," said the preacher. "There's plenty of warrant in Holy Writ for helping injured Yankees."

"I reckon some of that soap is going to be used on a Yankee after all," said Dr. Cowan. "Funny, isn't it? We raid soap off the Yankees in the name of war and give it back in the name of mercy."

32

An hour before this General Bedford Forrest had summoned Beasley Nichol to his tent. "Lieutenant, you still a little squeamish about getting in a tight place?"

"My first interest is still me, General Forrest," Nichol answered with a Nichol grin.

"We'll all have to go some day. A man can't outlast his time. I doubt if I live out the war. Still, I aim to hold on as long as I

can. I reckon I'd dodge a bullet if I saw it comin'. How's the sergeant?"

"The doctor says it's too early to tell. My notion is he will get well."

"He's got a thick head. The trouble with a lot of our soldiers is their blood's too blue and their heads are too thin. If anything solid comes near enough to hear, their skulls are liable to cave in. Nice to have that Nashville girl at Mrs. Napier's."

"Thank you for arranging it, General Forrest."

"I didn't arrange to have the sergeant shot. That just fitted in. Well, I got a job for you."

"Yes, General."

"And it ain't as safe as playing checkers on a country-store porch in Marshall County. I want to know something about the Chattanooga Road. I got a notion we goin' to whip the Yankees today. We've tried not to; we're still a-tryin' not to; but looks like it's goin' to be forced on us. All right, if we whip 'em, they can't stay here. They got to go somewheres. And there ain't any place for 'em to go except Chattanooga. And they ain't but one road for 'em to go by. Now, I reckon it was that bridge got me thinkin'. If we could stop the road up somehow, it wouldn't do the Yankees the least bit of good. What I want is for you and the captain to put on blue suits, ride along the road and see what you can think up. I've been over it and I don't know any fancy tricks we could play. I don't remember a place where we could give 'em a real comeuppance, but there might be. You see any sense in it, Lieutenant?"

"It'd make a nice outing, General."

"You look a little peaked. You need air. And a little absence would make that Nashville girl's heart grow fonder. If you and the captain can think up any way to block the road, don't stand back on my account. If the Yankees catch you, just go ahead 'n tell 'em I advised against it. We mustn't have them blaming me. Get started the minute the captain comes back."

He turned an attentive ear toward the silent front. "Jehosephat, what's got into this army? Is it waitin' for the moon to change?"

At eight o'clock Bedford Forrest's men sat their horses awaiting the order to advance. Nine o'clock and still they waited, though most of them had dismounted and stood relaxed by their horses, holding reins tightly and ready to spring to the saddle at the first hint of command.

"The breakfus I et is done plumb used up," complained Corporal Wheeler.

"Breakfus!" Corporal Judd snorted. "I know breakfus when I see it, and if that was breakfus I'm a mud turkle. More Floridy blue beef and cold cawn bread! Try feedin' that mess to a houn'-dog in Scott County, Kentucky, and it'd turn on you and rend you apart. It's happened lots o' times. Read your history book."

"I'm not a-goin' to try it," affirmed Corporal Wheeler. "I like dogs."

"And what's more I've jes about took root standin' here. What use is they in puttin' off a battle till you're old and stiff in the joints? You fight better when you're still young. Jes read your history book. Ifn you goin' to have a battle the bes' thing is jes have it."

"Bed's a-waitin' on the other ginrals. They don't git started easy."

"There's Bed talkin' to Lieutenant Nichol. Lay you two bits they up to some devilment. Like as not they got their minds on another bridge. Ever' time I seen them two with their heads togethuh, I feel sort o' glad I'm not a Yankee."

"Blue beef and cawn bread, cold cawn bread at that. You can't eat that and whup the Yankees."

"You wrong about that. Feed a feller a mess o' that truck and he'd start a wah with his grandpappy. I expect that's the reason they feed it to us."

"Well, it don't put me in no fightin' notion. I'd shake hands with Abe Linkern for a mess of fried apple pies."

"Come to think o' it," said Judd, "I ain't a-fightin' so good lately myself, and I reckon that Floridy blue beef's the reason. Why,

ifn Jeff Davis had good sense he'd send me all the ham I could hold from Scott County, Kentucky, and two gallons o' butter beans and a bushel o' hot biscuits and a peck o' blackberry jam and nine coconut cakes and——"

"And a wagonload o' fried dried-apple pies and a tub full o' sweet potatoes cooked with New Orleans sweetenin'——"

"Shet up. I got feelin's."

"You wasn't a-shettin' up none when I had feelin's—— Listen to that!"

South and west of them the cannon thundered powerfully and there was the distant roll of musketry.

"That's what we been waitin' for," said Wheeler. "We got us a battle at last."

Orders were shrilled all over the area. Forrest's men leaped to their horses and maneuvered into position.

They were away at a hard gallop. Straight to the west they rode, and the noise of battle came nearer and nearer, and the pungent smell of gunpowder grew stronger and stronger in their nostrils. They rode across a parched meadow and up a little rise. Before them was a strip of stunted timber and lining it a fence four or five rails high. Their horses took the fence without a fault, and then they were in the timber. They slowed down, for the going was not smooth. The woodland reached to the top of the rise.

Near the crest an order was relayed along the line. "Dismount and hitch your horses. Each one remember clearly where he hitches his. He may need it in a hurry."

So it was to be more foot fighting as though they were common infantry men. What was getting into Bed lately?

They hitched their horses and formed out of sight just below the crest. The men were told that the troops of Gist and Liddell were applying pressure on the enemy to their left and this would probably force a retreat toward the Chattanooga Road. If that happened the Yankees would probably pass just over the rise, a situation made to order. They would wait in perfect silence, and if the Federals fled by, they'd pounce on them with devastating surprise. South of them the world was bedlam. About them

among the scrub oaks and pines was a primeval calm. Some of the soldiers took out their pipes, but the order was passed to put them back. The woods were as dry as powder, and besides the smoke from a hundred pipes would betray their presence. It was very hot, and in the air was the first hint of rain for weeks. They stood in the scant shade, talked in low tones and waited.

"Floridy blue beef!" said Corporal Wheeler. "What is the stuff anyhow? I've et a lot o' beef and this isn't even kin to any I ever tasted before. This stuff never hopped nor walked on four legs. I think it musta crawled."

The crash and rattle to the south multiplied. The order went around to make ready for a charge. The Yankees were retreating toward the Chattanooga Road.

One minute passed; two minutes; still the time was not right. For ten minutes they stood hardly breathing. At last the shout "Charge!"

Forrest's men dashed forward, raising their bloodcurdling yell. Over the little rise they leaped. Wheeler and Judd were on the extreme right. Wheeler's long legs and Judd's shorter and fatter ones covered the rough ground so fast that they edged ahead of their comrades. Wheeler looked across the broken field to the left. The foe had been caught in complete surprise. The timing of the charge had been perfect. Its momentum was cutting the Northern troops off from the Chattanooga Road and turning them in on their right flank. Forrest with typical cunning had sent a column forward far to the left, and the enemy was seized in a grim vise.

Wheeler's quick eye saw something else, something for which his eyes were specially trained—supply wagons, a string of them, five or six, driven wildly. But their progress was slow, for plainly they were heavily loaded and the field was rugged. The drivers were plying the whip madly for their only way of escape lay up a little hill.

"Looka there," said Wheeler pointing to the wagons.

"Looka there," said Judd pointing slightly to the right.

One of the supply wagons was not a hundred yards ahead. They never knew how it had got there. It was in trouble, the

horses floundering. There was no sight of the driver and his helper. They must have fled when the horses stalled.

Judd and Wheeler charged. Judd reached the wagon first and plunged head foremost into the wagon's open rear end. He lay there, his feet sticking out and joyfully kicking, his hands exploring. Suddenly from behind an outcropping stone the driver of the wagon stood up and leveled his musket ominously at Corporal Judd's visible parts.

Wheeler had no time to bring his rifle into play, but in his pocket were the inevitable two throwing rocks. With one extended motion his right hand scooped one out and hurled it. It struck the driver's shoulder as he pulled the trigger. The bullet whistled ten feet above the wagon. The driver dropped his gun and started to run, but the second rock hit him hard in the back and he went down, the breath completely out of him.

By then Corporal Wheeler's mind was on other matters. "What they got in there?" he called to his comrade.

A muffled reply came from the depths of the wagon. "Cheese, a lot o' cheese."

"You mean a whole wagonload o' cheese?"

"Haven't found anything else."

"You et any?"

"Only to make sure it ain't spoiled."

"Here, let me look." Wheeler climbed into the wagon and he, too, made sure that the contents weren't spoiled.

"We got to git this wagon back to Bed Forrest. We liable to git court-martialed if we don't hurry."

"Looks to me like that brake rod's jammed. Yes sir, that's the trouble. It's jammed."

"Well, you unjam it."

Wheeler unjammed it and they turned the wagon about. Then they jumped down, lifted the man who was gradually getting his breath back and dumped him unceremoniously into the wagon with the cheese. The conflict had slackened, and they could see groups of captured Yankees being herded to the rear. Across the field beyond them came their comrades bringing the other wagons to add their contents to the cheese they were fetching.

The uproar south and west of them was growing more intense and spreading. From the sound of it there was fighting as far as the Widow Glenn's.

Judd brought the horses to a stop. "Stop that fidgetin' back there!" he yelled to the prisoner. "You're gittin' off easy, tryin' to shoot me from behind. If you don't stay still, you liable to git hurt bad. Lucky for you I got a forgivin' nature."

"It ain't your nature; it's that cheese," observed Corporal Wheeler.

"Mebbe so." Judd lovingly patted a swelling bulk in his pants pocket. "One thing's for certain: I ain't eatin' no Floridy blue beef for dinner."

"I ain't neither," Corporal Wheeler answered patting a similar lump.

34

The driver and College Grove sat on the seat of their wagon stationed in a grove near Chickamauga Creek and listened to the crash of battle to the west.

Their horses, still harnessed to the wagon, dozed in the afternoon sun. They were used to cannon and rifle and shrill yelling. Grim experience had taught them that sleep was the best recompense for scant allotments of corn and fodder. They dozed and dreamed of home and pools of fresh water and good crop years.

"Heard Frank Cheatham's goin' to take out o' your pay the price o' that plank you busted with your haid yestidy," observed College Grove.

"Us rich people got more things to think about 'n pay." The driver felt of his head. "Feels better than it ever did. You ought to try buttin' a plank sometime."

Suddenly the din of conflict rose. The shouting swelled, and the crackle of musketry beat more sharply. A horsefly buzzed and lighted and then tumbled lifeless to the ground. The driver drew in his whip. Then he turned his face toward the conflict. "Sounds like us Rebs is spunkin' up to Ol' Thomas," he ob-

served. "I knowed he'd keep on till he got us mad. He's got it comin' to him."

"Somewheres down this side o' the Snodgrass house," said College Grove after due meditation. "That's where they say Ol' Thomas is. Who you reckon is jumpin' on him?"

"Could be Jawn Hood. I heard he thinks he's a houn'-dog and the Yanks is rabbits. I expect it's Jawn."

"I seen him yestidy. Looked a lot bunged up to me. Some rabbit musta bit him."

"A rabbit Ginral Lee caught up Nawth. Just about bit a arm off. I heard Jawn woulda died ifn he hadn't been from Texas."

"Never heard of a feller from Texas a-gittin' killed. It's the water they drink outa them dry rivers."

They lapsed into silence. The driver's gaze was fixed toward the main battle. After a long pause he said, "Ifn that's Jawn he's shore a-barkin' out loud. He must be a-aimin' to ketch him a big rabbit this time."

"I like to be clost enough to see it," said College Grove wistfully. "What's the notion puttin' us this fur off?"

"Ain't a-runnin' no risks. They ain't much in them wagons, but ifn he didn't have it Ginral Frank Cheatham's goose would be plenty cooked."

"Ifn we do whup the Yankees, don't you reckon they might head back this way?"

"They'll hotfoot it for Chattanooga. Ain't no other way for 'em to go."

"I sometimes wisht this war was over." College Grove sighed. "It's a-gittin' bothersome to me. What's the matter with you?"

The driver had snatched the rifle from its rack at his side. He was standing and the rifle was pointed at a clump of undergrowth.

"Come out o' there," he yelled, "and ifn you have a gun in sight I'm a-goin' to shoot mine!"

There was no response. "I seen you sneak in there, and I know prezactly where you is and I ain't a-waitin' no longer. I done told you oncet to come out."

At that there was a movement in the underbrush. Two Yankee

soldiers scrambled to their feet and walked slowly toward the wagon. They were boys in their middle teens and obviously frightened.

"Where's your guns?"

"We threw them away," one said.

"That's a funny thing to do. Ain't no Yankee army less 'n a mile off. What you a-doin' here?"

The boys said nothing. The driver placed his rifle at his side and shifted his whip to his right hand.

"I'll tell you how it is," he said pleasantly. "You boys has dee-serted."

They stood there, young and unhappy, saying nothing.

"The army ain't what you thought it'd be when you j'ined up. An' lately they bin puttin' you through the mill, and you got to thinkin' about your folks. Still, I'd say you made a mistake. You'd never git back to Indiany."

"Pennsylvania."

"That's jes what I thought." The driver thoughtfully slew a horsefly on the lead horse's hip. He continued: "Now you take me. The army ain't been treatin' me right neither. Sometimes the way they ack you'd think I was a left-handed stepchile and what I gits to eat would make you starve sooner 'n to do with it. But I can't quit. Nosiree, they'd hang me higher 'n a coon can clim' a poplar tree. Where you soldiers a-tryin' to git to?"

"Home," they said in unison.

"They'd ketch you afore you got started. But ifn you made it, it'd be all the wuss. Home is the porest place they is to git hung at. And they's another thing. Even ifn they didn't hang you, you'd wish they did the way fo'ks back home'd treat you. No sir, a dee-serter ain't got no more chancet than a chicken snake at a shindig." The driver's whip hissed through the hot air and another horsefly died.

"Aren't you going to capture us?"

"What fur? You got wuss appytites 'n houn'-dogs. No sir, the Yankees promised to feed you and my idee is to hol' 'em to it. No sir, I'm a-goin' to have to let you go back to 'em."

The boys stood staring at him with troubled eyes.

"It's my idee that dee-sertin's a mighty bad thing. It'd git you in a whole lifetime o' trouble. It's a long sight wuss 'n spyin'. It's wuss 'n anything except j'inin' up with the enemy. Now my idee is the more you hurry to git back whar you belong, the further off you'll git from a hangin'."

"You mean go back?"

"Ain't a-meanin' nothin' else. You hunt up your guns and hustle back where you belong. With all this ruckus on they won'ta missed you."

The boys looked at each other. Without a word they turned and went back across the little stretch of cleared place into the copse and were soon lost from sight. The driver put his rifle upon the rack. Another horsefly was feasting at the base of a horse's tail. He killed it. There was a lull in the tumult toward Snodgrass Hill.

"What you reckon Frank Cheatham'll say 'bout you turnin' them Yankees loose?" College Grove inquired reproachfully. "That ain't no way to run a war."

"Them two ain't a drop in the Cumberland River. They's too young to be treated like soldiers. They ought to be back home in the Fourth Reader."

"Ifn they'd shoot a gun it'd kill a Reb jes the same as if they's a hundred."

"When the war's over and I see them fellers, they'll thank me jes like I was their daddy."

"And ifn they shoot me afore the war's over, why, my blood'd be on your head jes like the Good Book says."

"That'd be a good chance for me to do some fust-rate braggin'. And since you brings it up, it was Frank Cheatham that sicked me on to it."

The driver's eyes turned again toward Snodgrass Hill and he sang:

"Oh, who will come and go with me?
I am bound for the promus land."

Crockett and Nichol rode away on their tour of inspection of the Chattanooga Road. They carefully avoided the main road at first. They traveled by a back-country route paralleling it. They meant to avoid any territory held by Southern troops except those of Forrest's command. His soldiers were fully aware of the likelihood of seeing two of their own number arrayed in Yankee blue, and were duly indoctrinated in certain unfailing techniques of identification. Almost no traffic was on the road. Twice they encountered scouting parties out on Forrest's order to guard against secret movements by the enemy. They greeted these but kept going.

"The sergeant doing all right?"

"He's going to get well, but Dr. Cowan hasn't found it out for certain yet."

"Any danger of running across your Princeton brother on this trip?"

"There's no telling about him. He moves around. Now you see him and now you don't, heaven be praised! But when the war is over, and, if the sergeant gets well, I'm going to hunt the fellow up. I think he'd be most interesting. Isn't it funny what's happened to Princeton? That's the college the culture in the South came from. While I was there I got interested and looked it up. Who do you think were the leading preachers and teachers and lawyers—in fact, almost everybody of any special importance in the early days?"

"Princeton men, I suppose."

"Indeed they were."

"They're not now."

"That troubles me a great deal. Princeton made us what we are, and then sent other Princeton men down to shoot us because of it. Now isn't that odd? War's grotesque!"

"Is the sergeant conscious yet?"

"Not yet, but he'll get well. The doctor says his skull is definitely cracked and he's afraid it may be splintered."

"That'd be bad."

"It certainly would be, but I know the sergeant's skull pretty well and in my opinion it's not the splintering kind. Goforth has a very sturdy skull, Captain."

The roar of conflict filled all the air to the south and southwest. They heard the clatter of a horse galloping hard toward them.

"Only one," said Nichol. "No special cause for alarm."

"Anyhow we'll watch him like he was two."

The two rode on, but their eyes were cast back over their shoulders and one hand of each man stayed close to his pistol.

"Wait!" called their pursuer.

"It's Walker Stamps," said Nichol.

"Wonder what Bed wants."

They waited until the rider reached them. He was Bedford Forrest's favorite messenger, a laughing daredevil of twenty-two whose poise and good humor nothing earthly could disturb, who had read widely and in good taste and who was wont to dramatize everything.

"Hi!" he said with no reference to their superior rank. "Enjoying your canter among the pleasant groves? The correct answer certainly is not *yes*. That would infuriate His Majesty, Bedford the First, whom it angers greatly for his subjects to enjoy anything. The way to win a war, thinks Bed, is not to enjoy anything. That, he holds, makes a war most enjoyable."

"Older children," remarked Nichol, "have been spanked for impudence less pronounced. Did you come on business or to canter among the pleasant groves, all the while dispensing A-grade wisdom freely to all within hearing?"

"Well, on business, as you might say. His Majesty suggested to me, very tactfully of course, since otherwise I wouldn't have stirred, to ride after you and say that the battle is joined and all goes well."

"Say to King Bedford that his device for getting rid of a distracting influence is perfectly understood by us. Anything further, boy?"

"Seems as though there was a codicil to the main proclamation. Oh, yes, it dawns upon me. This is it, noble lords and kind

sirs. The enemy flee on all sides. It is Bedford's contention that whenever possible we should obstruct their flight, doubtless for the purpose of achieving some trifling military advantage. It is therefore His Majesty's wish that you proceed in all speed to the performance of the insignificant chores which he assigned you as fitting to your capacity. Or, as you might put it, hurry is the watchword."

"So . . . *'twere well It were done quickly*. Say to His Noble Majesty that we will fatten out our canter into a gallop and use all haste in behalf of his mission excepting that demanded by *vaulting ambition which o'er-leaps itself* . . . I presume that the clarity of my speech commends itself."

"It hath the sound of a true yeoman, and no syllable will be omitted when I unfold your reply to Bed, including sarcasm, slurs, sneers and disrespectful allusions to our great general himself. He shall hear all."

He dug spurs into his horse and was gone like a flash.

"Don't tell me that Stamps is one of your Princeton brothers," Crockett said.

"No, Sewanee on the Tennessee mountain. He left the college and came to the war. Bed Forrest think's he's a twin brother to Mercury."

"I've a notion that this is a wild-goose chase. I came over the road not a week ago and I haven't the slightest recollection of any place that could be damaged so an army couldn't repair it in a few minutes."

"I also came over the road and I have the same feeling, but we'll see."

"I suppose Bed is having trouble getting that bridge off his mind."

"I don't remember a bridge on our entire route."

"I don't either, or any place up the ridge that could be blocked."

"Well, Bed expects every man to do his duty at least twice. We'll see."

They galloped into the Chattanooga Road and turned toward town. The way was congested with traffic, all outbound.

"Your bridge did the work," said Crockett. "Now the Yankees have to bring everything this way."

Nichol looked appraisingly up and down the short stretch visible, and saw at least ten wagons toiling along. The horses were fagged from the weather and the punishing gait expected of them. They were hauling provender for a hungry army. The wagons were grimed with dust but clearly new and sturdy.

"They must be the new Studebaker wagons we've been hearing about," said Nichol. "Bed was wishing for some the other day."

"He ought to tell Judd and Wheeler to fetch in a few."

The two horsemen rode slowly down the long ridge, their eyes never leaving the road and its margins, studying every inch of it with fine care. They had not been mistaken: there was no bridge, no precipice, no overhanging bluff. The road was rough and rutted, but, with conditions as they were, no break could be made in it which would interrupt for long the passage of the wagons that fed the army.

"Well, the general missed it this time," said Crockett. "Let's go back."

"Bed really wasn't counting on it very much. He was just guessing. Anyhow, let's go on a little farther. We might run across something interesting."

They rode slowly down the ridge. At intervals they passed wagons that, despite the profanity of the drivers and straining of the horses, were just creeping along. The sun beat down on them with directness and fervor. The scant vegetation along the roadside was ghastly from thirst and long accretions of dust. When the air was momentarily free from dust, the heat waves danced and shimmered in the spaces ahead of them. The grim roar of combat behind them was far away but incessant.

Crockett pointed. Nichol's eyes followed and saw the dreadful harbingers of battle—buzzards, many of them, sailing lazily, not very high, casually drifting southward. Nichol shivered and turned his gaze away.

They rounded an easy curve and saw ahead of them two whom at first glance they took to be Northern officers standing on the ground and holding the reins of their horses. One horse

seemed in great distress. The man who held it raised his hand, signaling them to stop. There was nothing else to do. They couldn't ignore the appeal except at a risk too great to assume. At the same instant they noted something odd about the uniforms the men were wearing. Crockett and Nichol knew uniforms. It was a part of their training. They knew that these belonged to accredited correspondents, reporting battles and military movements to Northern papers and magazines. Their eyes met and in a fleeting glance each told the other that here was something to think about.

The rider of the sick horse bowed to them and addressed Crockett. "Do you know anything about horses, Captain?"

"Yes," said Crockett. "I've had a great deal of experience with them."

"Something's wrong with mine."

Crockett's eyes searched the horse expertly. "Too much riding on too hot a day. Water taken sparingly and rest in the shade will get him ready to travel again."

"Neither of us knows anything at all about horses," the man said.

Again Crockett's glance met Nichol's. Crockett's eyes swept up and down the road. For once, neither wagon, nor horse, nor soldier was near. The distressed horse stood with head bowed listlessly, its sides thumping.

"Would either of you lend, rent or sell me your horse? I'm Govan Noble of *Leslie's Weekly*. This is my colleague, Adam Rowell. It's imperative for us to reach the battlefield right away. I'm certain the Federal Administration would be pleased by any help you can lend us."

"We wouldn't be permitted to let you have our horses, but perhaps we can help you get yours in shape to go on."

"Then, in heaven's name, do! We must go on. We must reach the battle. How long will it take to relieve my horse?"

"Possibly a half hour. Maybe a little more or less. We'll have to get it to a shade. This horse has had all the sun it can stand for a while."

Noble's eyes measured the sun impatiently. "Very well. Let's not lose time. Otherwise our whole trip will be lost."

"There's a strip of shade yonder, and maybe a pool of water somewhere along there." Nichol pointed to a line of trees and undergrowth a hundred yards east.

They turned off the road and in two or three minutes came to a shade fairly deep, lining the bank of a creek bed, apparently dry, fifty feet below them. Nichol scrambled down the bank and climbed back carrying his hat two-thirds full of water.

"Fresh from the last pool of summer," he said. "It's hot and it had a thick scum on it, but the horse won't mind. Give it a swallow at a time."

With both hands Noble held the hat to the horse's mouth and it lapped frantically.

"Take it away," Nichol said. A few seconds later he motioned Noble to give the horse more water. And so for minutes it went on: a swallow, a wait, then another swallow, until the water was gone.

"That will do until its sides have stopped thumping. It won't be long. Then, if you can get it to water, give it all it wants."

Crockett's eyes met Nichol's once more. He turned to Noble. "We've had an epidemic of spies lately. We have to be very careful. Please let me see your credentials. I'm sorry, but you'll understand."

A puzzled look grew on the correspondent's face. He shrugged with a hint of impatience. Then he handed a small folder to Crockett, who opened it, glanced at a card, unfolded a letter and looked through it.

Crockett turned to Rowell. "Yours, please."

It was handed him. He looked at it and put it in his pocket. He gave Noble's to Nichol. The two correspondents stared at him, mouths open.

"I'm sorry," Crockett told Noble grimly, "but it has become necessary for you to change uniform with my friend here. I fancy you'd prefer to live, so we won't discuss it. Start getting that uniform off." The pistol held menacingly in his hand was

convincing. Noble started to reach for a weapon, but when he saw Crockett's he changed his mind. Noble's arm relaxed and he began to unbutton his blouse.

Five or six minutes later Nichol cast an appraising eye over himself. "I've worn worse fits," he said whimsically. "Right becoming, I call it. Mr. Noble, if we ever see you after the war we'll make up for this. We're rude only because war is a rude business. Sooner or later it brings rudeness out in all of us."

"Time for you to go," said Crockett. "Use his pass and the letter from General Rosecrans to his publishers. You might have some luck. See everything you can, and get back to Bed as soon as there's nothing more worth seeing. I'll get back to him within two or three hours. I won't kill them, though it really would save time. No, don't go yet. You have some cord in your pocket. Tie their hands and feet. It might be better. And take his pistol with you. You might need two. Get the other one for me. I'll stay with them awhile to give you time. I'll be careful. I'd better be. You think fast in an emergency. Well, you're in one now. So start thinking fast. Good luck and don't quote any Shakespeare to the generals! Not being Princeton men, they might be prejudiced against him."

Nichol got by the guards easily, a whole series of them. Apparently they had been instructed to be unusually civil to representatives of the press. Perhaps the North was in need of more sympathetic reporting.

But the guards didn't know where the generals might be found. The clangor of battle was everywhere, and Nichol knew that a great struggle like this demanded mobility of the leaders. They had to be everywhere. They might be anywhere.

Presently he came to crude field quarters. The sentry answered his question. "Don't know where General Rosecrans is. He hasn't been here for more 'n an hour. Colonel Wilder's up yonder. Want to see him?"

"Very much," said Nichol.

The guard led the way to the tent. An orderly stood in the entrance.

"This man wants to see Colonel Wilder."

The orderly looked Nichol over. "Who shall I tell him it is?"

"Govan Noble, with *Leslie's Weekly*. I have a letter from General Rosecrans."

"Let's see your pass."

Nichol handed it over. The orderly looked it through carefully. He pulled back the flap and disappeared within the tent. He was out again within a minute. "Colonel Wilder says come in."

The colonel sat at an improvised table. He looked up, his keen eyes studying his visitor. "Good morning, sir. May I see your credentials?"

Nichol handed him the folder including the letter to *Leslie's* from General Rosecrans. He read the contents hurriedly and passed it back.

"Naturally we welcome you, and any favorable publicity you can give our army. We need it. This letter mentions two of you——"

"My companion's horse became disabled, and I didn't wait for him. I had to get here without delay. He'll come later, just as soon as he can."

"Sorry," said Colonel Wilder, his ears and thoughts on the sounds of conflict to the south and east. "We appreciate your presence, but you come at a most unfavorable time, sir. None of us will have much time to be helpful, though it is certainly our wish to be."

"My publication would consider it a great favor if I might be permitted to witness some of the conflict. We've been able to get few direct accounts of battle."

"We have no objection to that, but you'll have to see it as best you can. I have to go to General Thomas now. If you want to ride with me at least a part of the way, very well. After that you'll have to use your own devices. And I warn you, it's dangerous. Your credentials will not turn aside a Rebel bullet."

"Of course," said Nichol. "I understand that perfectly. I'm a bit battle-broke. You see, I was at Antietam. I'll take care of myself."

As they galloped along Colonel Wilder explained the nature of the country and of the battle. He pointed out the position of various units of both armies. Nichol listened intently and mentally recorded all he could. His eyes flicked about, searching everything.

They were not a mile back of actual conflict, though the troops were hidden by the scrub oaks and cedars.

"That, of course, is Missionary Ridge just behind us," Wilder said. "Those jutting hills yonder form Horseshoe Ridge. You can see only part of it for the smoke. That's the anchor of General Thomas' army. Beyond the foot of the ridge it's reasonably flat all the way to the creek. Those advancing troops—see, beyond that clump of pines, there where the smoke has lifted—those are the Rebels." Nichol took note of them. "I should imagine they're either Hill's or Forrest's men, from what we know of their position. General Forrest, as you've doubtless heard, is famous for doing surprising things. This time he has dismounted his soldiers and they're fighting on foot."

Nichol couldn't resist the temptation. "Wasn't it Forrest's men who wrecked the bridge?"

Colonel Wilder mechanically tightened his bridle reins and looked at Nichol curiously. "You surprise me. Has that got out? It was expressly forbidden the papers."

"I heard about it yesterday. I assumed that was one of those baseless rumors."

"Unfortunately it wasn't. It was an audacious thing to do and it's causing us no end of trouble. It has made our problem of supplies very acute indeed. The destruction of the bridge is generally charged to Forrest, though of course that's mainly inferential. None of the other Rebels seems to have the imagination or the boldness." He looked at Nichol. "I don't believe I'd use an account of the bridge report unless General Rosecrans agrees to it."

Nichol was not looking through the smoke and over the pines

at Forrest's advancing men. His gaze, with an odd sharpness in it, was to the right of the oncoming soldiers, much to the right. His eyes were shining. He said something to Wilder to cover the intentness of his interest, but he never relaxed.

"We're being pressed back today," Wilder was saying, "but that was expected by most of us. Indeed, it's probably a part of the plan."

"No doubt you have telegraph services on the field," said Nichol.

"Yes, indeed. Our technical men are very ingenious."

"Could it be arranged for me to use the wire for my dispatch—of course, if it's not in use?"

"I'm sure you can have it. We need favorable reports spread among the people of the North, not the carping, faultfinding kind we've been getting. We don't mind our errors being published, but we don't want them magnified."

"That certainly conforms fully to the intentions of *Leslie's Weekly*."

"I fancy," Wilder said, "that I'll find General Thomas over there. I'm sorry to have to leave you."

"Think nothing of it," said Nichol. "I shall shift for myself. General Thomas hasn't time to bother with me today. It would really add to the value of my reports to be able to say, *This I searched out for myself*, or *I saw this entirely undirected*. Complaints have been prevalent in the North that newspaper correspondents on the field are permitted to see only what officers wish them to see. I'd like to contradict that."

"Certainly. I wish you well, sir. Please keep out of range of the Rebels' fire. There are many excellent places from which to use your field glasses. Good morning."

Colonel Wilder rode away.

Nichol sat there looking as if hypnotized at something down the ridge, back across the level fields and thickets of scrub timber. He adjusted the glasses and stared long and steadfastly. Then, no ears being near, he was moved to quote Shakespeare. "*Me-thinks I am a prophet new inspir'd . . .*" He shifted quotations. "*Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more . . .*"

At last he was satisfied. He put his field glasses in his pocket and rode slantingly down the ridge. He prodded his horse into a brisker gait, for he was in a hurry. The going was rough. The ridge was covered with boulders and stunted cedars. His horse stumbled and floundered about but kept its feet. Finally he was clear of the pines, and the ground was much smoother.

The battle was raging not a half mile away. The shouts of the charging Confederates rang above the roll of musketry. Well he knew that shout. It had assurance of triumph in it. The wind was blowing over him thick fumes of cannon and mortar and rifle. He was as close as it was safe to get. He encountered several Northern officers, riding hurriedly away from the front, but they gave him only a fleeting glance, and one of them waved casually. For a half mile he rode almost straight north; then he turned to the east, skirting a front relatively quiet.

"Ugh!" A cannon ball struck not a hundred yards away. "That must be Barksdale's artillerymen," he said half aloud. "Bed claims they shoot too high a lot of the time. Hold it down, brothers!"

Nichol spurred his horse. He passed quickly through the cleared space and again was riding among pine trees. Again he fretted silently because of reduced speed. He kept going and presently knew he had passed Rosecrans' left. He went on another mile for safety's sake then started bearing sharply around to the southeast.

Ten minutes later he was loudly hailed by a company of Forrest's pickets. He flashed the proper signal, and the pickets hallooed and galloped joyfully out to meet him. He was escorted promptly into General Forrest's presence.

"Well, well," said the general, "so you're back. Did you enjoy your ride? Don't tell me you're going to let the Yankees get back to Chattanooga free gratis?"

"I'm afraid they will. But, General Forrest, there's something else——"

"I didn't send you for anything else."

"We rode to the bottom of the ridge. We looked over every

foot of the road. There isn't a thing we can do about it, General. Crockett will tell you the same. We can't block the Yankees on that road. But there's something we can do, and we've got to hurry."

"All right then. You hurry and I'll listen."

Nichol crowded in closer and told General Forrest of the morning's sequence of events. The general listened eagerly, his eyes brightening.

"I stopped for a while upon a small hill this side of Missionary Ridge, maybe a half mile back behind Horseshoe."

"Jehosephat," said General Forrest. "Keep on talking."

"It was then, General, that I saw it."

"Get to the point. Saw what?"

"Saw a break in the Yankee lines a mile wide."

"Where did you see a break? What are you a-talkin' about, Lieutenant? What break?"

"General Forrest, I saw exactly what I said I did. It was there as plain as daylight. Maybe the gap has some soldiers left in it, but not many. They were moving out. They were leaving an empty place in the front line——"

"Where is it?"

"There's a farmhouse on a little hill right under the shadow of Horseshoe Ridge——"

"You mean the Snodgrass house?"

"I don't know what house it is. It may be that one. Well, the gap is just east and little south of that house, maybe a half mile."

"You sure you saw it, Lieutenant?"

"As sure as I'm alive, General. The soldiers have been cleared out of it. Why, I don't know, but they were leaving. Most of them had already gone."

"Good thing somebody's got gumption enough to get where he can see things and know what he sees. I reckon we'd better go look up Longstreet. That's in his district. You come along with me."

They found General Longstreet back from the Brotherton house toward Chickamauga Creek sitting on his horse and play-

ing his field glasses on the level spaces and the ridge to the west. A staff officer was with him, and he, too, was earnestly watching the progress of the battle.

Forrest and Longstreet had never met before, but each knew the other at first sight. Their greetings were hearty but with few words wasted.

Longstreet listened carefully to Nichol's statement.

"I knew they were thin there, at least in front, but I thought maybe it was a bait. All right, we'll hit them there. I'll go see General Hood. He's the man to try out that gap. Stewart can help him."

General Forrest and Lieutenant Nichol returned to Forrest's position on the extreme right. They passed behind the lines of Bushrod Johnson, of Cleburne, of Cheatham. On most of these fronts the action was intense, and to judge from the firing and cheering the troops were advancing slowly but steadily. A brisk wind blew from the front and at times the smoke was so thick as to make invisible a man twenty paces distant. The roar of the battle was deafening. Three men came through the thicket toward them, riding at a sharp canter. When the foremost got out of the curtain of smoke into thinner air, they saw that it was General Frank Cheatham. The others were orderlies.

"Good morning, Bedford. Or is it still morning? Any news?"

"Maybe, Frank. I don't know for certain. Nichol here has been on Missionary Ridge, and he swears he saw a division—I think it was Wood's—marching out of the front and leaving a gap wide enough for us to follow through. When the lieutenant thinks he saw something, I've found out that he usually saw it. So we rode over to tell Longstreet about it. It was in front of him."

General Cheatham's eyes widened. "Missionary Ridge! I like a joke as well as any man, but——" He saw the look on the faces of General Forrest and Nichol and broke off. "What was Lieutenant Nichol doing on Missionary Ridge?"

"I sent him," said General Forrest succinctly.

"Oh, you did!" General Cheatham's sarcasm had returned.

"He saw Rosecrans himself, and everybody had a good time, and they'll print all about it in the paper."

"No, General Cheatham," Nichol said demurely, "but I spent some time in Colonel Wilder's tent. He rode a piece with me to show me the sights. I found him very accommodating and agreeable."

Cheatham glanced at Nichol. "I suppose you saw Abe Lincoln, too. Go on, Lieutenant. Don't let me stop you when you've got such a good start."

"Only Colonel Wilder, General."

General Cheatham shifted his look to Forrest. "Bedford Forrest, if any other general, west of General Lee himself, told me a tale like this I'd call him the sort of liar I thought he was. But you—well, maybe you're right. You can't ever tell about a Middle-Tennessean. They're a funny breed. I'm in a hurry now. I've got to ride up on Missionary Ridge and pay a pleasant visit to General Rosecrans and this Colonel Wilder, and maybe see that gap for myself. It would be right entertaining." General Cheatham rode off.

"Did I say *Missionary Ridge*? Well, anyways, you were close to it."

"Will you need me for the next half hour, General?" Nichol asked.

"What's that you say?" The roll of musketry was deafening. "Look yonder, Lieutenant. That's something I like to see."

Nichol followed General Forrest's pointing finger. A squad of Southern soldiers were shepherding some captured Yankees to the rear. Nichol glanced at them and was starting to repeat his question when his eye caught something familiar among the blue-clad scramble of soldiers moving dejectedly toward Chickamauga Creek.

At the same instant Captain Ralph Whitaker looked up and recognized his fellow Princetonian. "First vacation I've had since I joined the army," he called jauntily. His voice sank to a gloomy pitch. "Just as well. I haven't had the slightest luck since I first laid eyes on you."

"Fortunes of war, Captain." Nichol remembered Goforth and his face grew grim. "It's not supposed to be lucky to try to kill me from ambush."

"I'll tell them about you first reunion I attend at Princeton."

"Move on!" yelled a corporal in gray tatters. "We in a hurry. We got to go back and get the rest of your uncles and cousins and kinfolks."

Whitaker shrugged and moved on.

"You do know a lot o' people, Lieutenant," said General Forrest.

"Sometimes I seem to know the wrong people. Sometimes I don't choose well. Could you spare me long enough to go see the sergeant a few minutes?"

"Go ahead, Lieutenant. I'd like to hear from him myself. Go ahead, but report back as soon as you can. The captain will be coming in any minute now. Me and him'll run the army till you get back."

Nichol saluted, wheeled his horse and made for Chickamauga Creek. It seemed to him that the battle had been getting fiercer since ten o'clock. At times it had ebbed a bit, but not much. He forded the creek's scant flow and rode along its eastern shore. Presently he came in sight of a road that turned south. His heart cooled, for one ambulance passed in a jog trot, then a second. He knew where they were bound. He could visualize the scenes in that house which a few days ago had been quiet and peaceful, but which had become a center of war's wretchedness. He slowed his pace, not wishing to pass the ambulances. They drove through the Napier front gate. He rode on to the barn lot and hitched his horse there.

Hunter came out on the back porch and hurried through the yard to meet him. "He's no worse," she said. "I'm afraid he's not much better, but I think the sergeant is going to get well. I do believe he will."

"I want to know about you too."

"I was sitting at his cot when something told me to look out the window. And there you were."

"I was riding up when something told me to look. And there you were coming out on the porch."

"Kiss me," she said. "I need it."

Soberly, tenderly, as if in the presence of death—which indeed they were—he kissed her. They started into the house, but she held him a moment on the porch.

"Six have died here today. They have taken them to the church. They will take others before long."

"Six!" he said in protest. "You poor girl!"

"Not poor at all. That isn't the way I feel. Could I do less than help make their going easier? I tell you those three women are angels."

"Four angels," he said.

"No, I've only tried to be. They are. They know what to do and how to do it. One boy wanted Mrs. Dewitt to sing a hymn that he had loved in his home church. She knew it and sang it as he wished. He knew he was dying, and the song helped him, gave him strength. All day long they have done the right thing, and said the words that did the most good. All day long it's been like that. Mrs. Thedford, too, sings for them. Her voice is quavery but sweet."

"Four angels—I've counted them."

In the hall a boy moaned softly. His face was the pallor of death. The doctor was bending over him. The soldier on the next cot was gasping his life out. A table was littered with cloths that had been used to stop the flow of blood. In the room with Goforth a soldier lay rigid, his eyes open and fixed, his breathing heavy.

"He's not out of the chloroform yet. They took off his arm. I don't know how many legs and arms have been taken off here today. Mrs. Napier ties the name of the man on the severed limb. If he lives, it will be buried with the other legs and arms. If he dies, with him."

Goforth lay quietly and was breathing easily. His face was bronzed from wind and sun, but its color was deeper than that. At times he muttered something low and unintelligible and

sometimes his fingers plucked sharply at the sheet that covered him.

Dr. Cowan came hurrying. He saw Nichol and stopped briefly. "I had expected some change in him before this but there hasn't been any. There will be before long." He moved on.

The front door opened and Chaplain Dewitt came into the hall. His broad-brimmed gray slouch hat he held in one hand and a frayed Bible in the other.

"This is the third or fourth trip he's made here today," Hunter told Beasley. "I'm sure it's the fourth. He comes in, stops at each cot, speaks a moment with his wife and rides back to the battlefield."

The chaplain stopped beside the soldier who had lost his arm. He dropped on his knees. When he rose he spoke to the two standing by Goforth's cot. "No change, I see. The man's as strong as an ox. He'll likely pull through. I expect it."

"How do you think the battle is going, Dr. Dewitt?"

"Terribly. We are pushing the Yankees back all along but at a cost that leaves me aghast. I was at Fishing Creek, at Shiloh and at Stone's River, but I've never seen so many dead soldiers on a field. I've seen dreadful things, but never so much actual death. I've never known so many killed outright. In some cases it was God's mercy for them to go quickly; but on the other hand even the badly wounded get well sometimes and the dead never do. The heat out there is awful and there's almost no water for the wounded. I never saw so ghastly a field."

He went out into the hall. They heard another ambulance arriving. The older Thedford grandson led the gaunt horse up from the spring and the water sloshed in the barrel. The younger boy went into the kitchen and threw down a load of stovewood. Goforth was muttering something but the words were incoherent. The boy whose arm had been amputated was stirring and groaning.

Dr. Cowan hurried out of one of the rooms. "Watch him," he said to Hunter. "The chloroform is wearing off. Don't let



him move about too violently." He went quickly back into the room. Another ambulance was coming.

"The newcomers will have to go on the back porch," Hunter said. "I must help find places for them."

After a long look at the sergeant, Beasley turned his eyes fondly to her. "And I must get back to General Forrest. . . . You're the loveliest person in the world."

"God keep you!" she whispered. "God keep us both! Come back when you can."

He went out the front door and around the house. As he passed the back porch they were laying the wounded soldiers on improvised beds, and Hunter was directing the ambulance drivers.

When he rode away from the house Nichol's quick eye caught sight of a mockingbird sitting high in a leafless maple tree. It was not singing but, in gay mood, hopped from limb to limb, preening itself and regarding the world with bright eyes. Nichol saluted the bird and flavored the air with the art of Shakespeare: "*Our aery buildeth in the cedar's top, And dallies with the wind, and scorns the sun.*"

37

The battle fought on that Sabbath day in September 1863 rose in fury from ten in the morning until the sun set on its tragic finale. The battleground had been chosen by neither North nor South. For two weeks both armies had been marching and countermarching, and when they bivouacked neither knew how to forecast the morrow. Each day had to form its own routine. Each army had moved behind a curtain, flimsy in parts, but baffling to the other army. General Rosecrans moved and General Bragg moved, and the move of each one determined in great degree the next move of the other. Day by day they had moved, and each night found them closer together and the ghastly deouement so much nearer.

In an odd hurry both armies had overrun their march to the

south and so came hurrying back with the ridges lifting high between them. Then Rosecrans crossed the ridges and Bragg crossed Chickamauga Creek and then they were too close together to avert the catastrophe which they half sought, from which they half flinched.

38

To begin the day the Southern armies had committed the grave sin of tardiness. Then came their enemy's turn to err. A corps commander misread or misinterpreted an order from the commanding general and pulled his men out of line to support his right. It was the resulting break in the line that Nichol had seen.

Into that breach Longstreet sent his veterans under the immediate command of Hood. The divisions of Kershaw, Stewart, Bushrod Johnson and Hindman followed him. Hood's Texans gave their hair-raising yell as they charged. On by the Brother-ton house they went in a swinging trot. Above the din of battle sounded their song of combat, loud, clear, terrifying.

Suddenly it ceased. Out of a fringe of timber to their left Northern troops charged down upon their flank and rear. Kershaw's men rushed to the rescue.

Hood, from a little ridge three hundred yards distant, saw what was happening and rode at a gallop through the woods toward his soldiers. They heard him shout to them—the hoarse powerful cry they knew so well. Some of them had heard it strike terror into the enemy's heart at Sharpsburg and at Gettysburg. They shook off the enemy, flung him to one side, and dashed on. Hood rode with them, his war cry sounding at short intervals. He was a large, spare, rangy man. His hair was thick and long and its color was of wheat ripened and burned by the sun. His beard was thick and matted. His eyes were the fighter's eyes, and he rode his horse with Texan grace and vigor. An arm hung helpless at his side. Gettysburg had been hard on arms.

A volley came from the stunted cedars to the right, and one of the Minié balls found the general's thigh. A soldier leaped from the ranks to take the reins of the frightened horse and two

other soldiers eased their stricken chieftain to the ground. "Don't stop! Go on!" he shouted.

Again the Texans' yell curled and eddied with the battle. McLaws, the Georgian, took Hood's place and led the men forward. They pushed Davis back, Brannan back and McCook's five brigades. The Georgians and North Carolinians took up the Texans' cry, made it their own and, so shouting, they surged irresistibly. The charge spread. Everywhere the Northern legions retired, sometimes fled.

But Thomas stood immovable on the heights of Horseshoe Ridge. There he held and held. His tenacity was costly. Time after time he sent messengers for reinforcements, but none came. The tide of battle had swept too high and far for that. So Thomas held on alone.

Except for him the whole Northern army had yielded to the momentum of Hood's charge. On the Federal right the confusion was incredible. The wagon trains were commingled with troops hurrying to Rossville, hurrying anywhere to get away from those charging, shrieking, victory-tasting Southerners, to get out of hearing of that tormenting yell. It struck more terror into their hearts than the bullets.

The sad-eyed, noble-browed Rosecrans heard the shouting, saw his men fleeing and the confusion swelling on the Rossville Road.

"We are badly beaten," he cried to General Garfield, his chief of staff. "We shouldn't have risked the battle. I have suspected this would happen. We must hurry to Chattanooga to provide for the safety of the men and the wagons. We'll make our stand there."

Together they galloped along the road, skirting as best they might the frantic soldiers and the wounded who had made their way so far before collapsing.

Presently Garfield rode with his face turned to the rear so that he might better catch the sounds of battle. There was a strange steadiness in the guns which he judged to be those of Thomas. Their thunder bore no overtones of defeat, no hint of yielding. It was wonderfully reassuring.

At Rossville he asked permission to return to the battlefield. He sensed that in the shadow of Horseshoe Ridge Thomas was holding, holding on a field from which most of his comrades had withdrawn.

General Rosecrans nodded assent. His mind was running ahead to Chattanooga—how it could be turned into both refuge and stronghold for his stricken soldiers. He rode at a headlong gallop into Chattanooga, and stopped his foam-flecked, heaving horse in front of the Catholic Church on Lindsay Street. He threw the reins over one of the palings and ran into the church where in prayer he had always found sanctuary from the trouble and terror of the world.

The sun was falling low when Garfield, after running a long gantlet of enemy fire, reached Thomas with the word of the disaster which had befallen the army's right.

"Shouldn't I stay?" Thomas asked Garfield. "I can hold the Ridge."

"Perhaps," said Garfield, "but General Rosecrans thinks you should fall back on Rossville. It would be safer there. Things haven't gone well today."

39

At this juncture Longstreet threw in his only unused troops—Preston's men—for one last desperate charge against Thomas' determined stand.

Many of them were beardless youths, and some of them as yet untried in major battle. But among them were veterans seasoned in campaign and hand-to-hand struggle. All that Sabbath day, all the day before, the commanding officers had held them in waiting and they had fretted under restraint.

Now they dashed for the Ridge, all their pent-up fury unleashed. At the foot of the hill they recoiled from the shock of the fire poured into them from the heights of Horseshoe Ridge. Stunned, they retreated for fifty or a hundred yards. Then with

the suddenness of youth they rallied. They turned back. In those few moments of confusion their vision had cleared and the untried had become veterans. Up the hill they went, not at a run, but with a stout resolution that denied the power of the lead from Thomas' rifles, the grape from his cannon. The buglers and fifers were killed or wounded, but a boy from Georgia took his beloved harmonica from his pocket and added a fierce fervor to the power of the charge with the stirring strains of "Dixie."

Stewart was coming up by the flank. Forrest was swinging far to the Federal left to block the routes of exit. Buckner's twelve cannon were roaring anew. Gracie's Alabamians were at the very threshold of Thomas' field quarters. Polk, on the right, was delivering his fifth charge of the day. Bushrod Johnson and Hindman, Kershaw and McLaws were swinging into focus against Horseshoe Ridge where Thomas was playing the role of *Rock* with such sturdiness as to earn for him an undying sobriquet.

So intense was the fire on the hillside that it was a miracle when one got through unscathed. And yet it was a miracle enacted by thousands. Alfred Clark carried the colors of the Seventh South Carolina regiment to the very brow of the Ridge. "A promotion to the man who takes those colors!" shouted General John Beatty of the Third Ohio Volunteers, and his men in answer swarmed across the cornfield. So savage was their charge that Kershaw's South Carolinians had to withdraw. Clark was the last to leave. As he started reluctantly down the heights a bullet struck him to the heart. In his last moment he threw the colors to his comrades farther down the slope, and they bore the flag to safety. A half hour later they were back with it, planting it on the spot where Clark was stricken.

Robert Hiatt, color-bearer of the Second Alabama Battalion, carried a flag up the heights. He was wounded three times, his flagstaff shot away. Though his hands were soaked with blood, he improvised a new staff from a sassafras sapling and kept going. It too was shot away, but Hiatt kept doggedly on. At sunset he stuck the stub of the flagstaff into a hole made by a cannon ball a half hour before in the wall of the Snodgrass

house. The next day General Bedford Forrest counted eighty-three bullet holes in the flag.

The battle rose and flamed on all the eastern front of Horse-shoe Ridge. The Confederates climbed it, were driven back, rallied, started up it again. Then there rose the wailing, screeching yell of Hood's Texans coming in on the right flank.

It was enough. Thomas led his men slowly, grudgingly by the McFarland's Gap Road toward Rossville almost five miles away.

The sun had fallen behind Lookout Mountain in the drab gray pallor of the smoke of battle. But a cloud was mounting in the southwest that promised hope to a land of thirst and travail. All about it was a look of rain. In the air was the vague promise of coolness.

40

General Thomas rode with General Garfield and General Granger. They rode slowly and said nothing, for there was nothing to say. Through the unearthly grimness of dust and smoke they could see a dim western glow lighting dully the crest of Missionary Ridge. They passed a home, humble and primitive. Crude tents were pitched in various parts of the yard. Women, stony-faced but bright-eyed, watched the tired, defeated soldiers file by in endless dusty columns. The women held infants in their arms, and children not much older stood rigid, clutching their mothers' hands and dresses. Older children watched, and anger smouldered in their eyes. Old men watched, resentful of the senility which doomed them to inactivity when the South called. General Thomas knew that they were people who had been taken from their homes on the battlefield and brought behind the lines for safety. He sensed the inarticulate triumph which the sight of his defeated legions raised in their hearts. The South had won. They could go home again, home to the Brotherton house, the Vidito house, the Poe house, the Glenn house, the Dyer house, the Wethers house, the Mullis house. Home!

General Thomas turned again to General Garfield. They rode on in silence. There was nothing to say.

41

Darkness fell, and the battlefield was thick with flickering torches borne by blue-clad stretcher-bearers searching for the wounded, moving in and out among gray-clad stretcher-bearers on the same mission of mercy, and among burial squads seeking the dead who lay mingled on that ghastly terrain. The tumult of the day had quieted into a frightful stillness broken only by a dull and continuous rumble toward Rossville, and by the creaking and lumbering of nearer wagons. At intervals sounded the cry of the wounded, pleading for water, for companionship, for a friendly voice. Now and then a horse neighed shrilly as if in bitter defiance. In the southwest a flash of lightning leaped across the face of a cloud, leaving terror in the blackness when it had faded. At times a sluggish wind breathed heavily. But the stars overhead shone in a harsh brilliance.

The victors were not cheering. They were too tired. They had paid too much for victory. Too many of their friends were dead or mangled. One does not cheer with the smell of his comrade's blood in his nostrils. About the world, that part of the world that lay between Missionary Ridge and Chickamauga Creek, was a great, bleak emptiness.

42

Chaplain Dewitt did not go back to Mrs. Napier's after the middle of the afternoon. There was too much need on the field. He hitched his horse behind the lines and walked over the battleground. A horse would only be in the way where he had to go. Suddenly he became aware that the wounded did not belong to the Eighth Tennessee. Where were Colonel Anderson's soldiers? These were not even Cheatham's men. He had no idea where the Eighth Tennessee was. He asked a passing courier.

"I don't know," the boy—for he was no more than that—

answered. "They're all mixed up. The whole army is mixed up. I don't know where any outfit is."

Very well. It didn't matter much. If he couldn't be chaplain for the Eighth Tennessee he'd be chaplain for the Army of Tennessee—yes, and for the five thousand men whom Longstreet had brought from Virginia too. A battlefield was a great dissolver of boundary lines.

The stretcher-bearers were carrying the wounded away, but many lay waiting for the burial squads. Whenever the preacher came to a wounded soldier who was conscious, he stopped to say a few words and to read something from his battle-scarred Bible. He was always welcome; there is a terrible loneliness on a battlefield.

Ahead of him a man rose from the ground and walked rapidly up the ridge. He was reeling and every few steps it seemed that he would fall. Dr. Dewitt knew the ways of wounded soldiers; that for all his haste the boy would not keep going long. He was giving all he had to go a little way. He staggered in and out among the dwarfed and mangled pines into a little shelflike clearing and on into a fringe of thicker woods. There he collapsed, and the chaplain caught up with him. He felt that the soldier was gone the moment he looked at him closely, but the boy was still conscious. Dr. Dewitt knelt down beside him.

"I must . . . get home, I . . . I must get home." The words were spoken in gasps.

"You'll be home very soon, I promise you."

"I must go. I know the way. I can . . . get home. I must."

"Of course you must. Where do you live?"

"Alabama . . . Jacksonville. I'm awful tired. I'll sleep awhile and then go on. You send my mother word. . . ."

He fell back. He had gone on.

Dr. Dewitt, still on his knees, eased the body to a straightened position on the ground. "Trying to get home," he said; "trying to get home." He lifted his eyes to the smoke-filled heavens and prayed: "Lord, this lad wasn't able to get back to his home in Alabama. Instead, Lord, take him to his home with Thee."

The preacher had heard the tread of horses' hoofs, but he con-

tinued his short prayer to the end. Then he looked up. Three men sat on horseback on the little shelf, Northern officers. Vaguely he recognized one of them from pictures he had seen. General George Thomas. They were looking at him. This meant of course that he was a prisoner of war. But did it? His loyalty was wholehearted, but he carried a Bible and not a musket.

He straightened himself to his full height. "Good afternoon," he said. "I'm Chaplain Dewitt of the Eighth Tennessee. Before he died, this soldier asked to be sent home. I'd like to ask your permission to go now to see what can be done to carry out his request."

General Thomas bowed courteously. "By all means, sir. If you need permission to pass through our lines I'll see that it's granted."

The chaplain started to leave. General Thomas looked long at him and spoke again. "Pray for our men too, Reverend. They need it." He and his companions rode on toward Rossville.

43

At Mrs. Napier's the day moved slowly to its close. The ambulances kept coming. When the porches filled, pallets were laid in the yard. The four ladies worked unceasingly. The surgeons fought back exhaustion, and no distressed soldier went without such care as they could give. The younger Thedford grandson kept wood in the kitchen stove and water in the kettles on it. His brother came and went, hauling water to allay the tormenting thirst of fighting men.

Late in the afternoon the battle drew closer to the house. Then it veered toward the heights of Horseshoe Ridge.

Dr. Cowan, his face haggard and his eyes troubled, walked through the hall to a room where Hunter was bathing a soldier's crushed foot. She looked up

The surgeon said, "I'm not satisfied with the condition of the sergeant General Forrest sent here."

"What is it, Dr. Cowan?"

"There are bad signs, not necessarily too bad, but I'm worried.

He keeps asking for Lieutenant Nichol. He's delirious, but I wish the lieutenant would come. Do you happen to know where he is?"

"No, I don't, Dr. Cowan, but if we could get word to General Forrest, he'd find him."

The surgeon thought for a moment. "One of the drivers can take a note to the general."

He scribbled something on a piece of paper and walked out to an ambulance which was turning about for the trip back.

Less than half an hour later Nichol hitched his horse in the barn lot. Hunter met him at the door. She told him quickly what had happened, and they hurried to the sergeant's room. Goforth babbled and plucked fiercely at the sheet which covered him. His face was the heavy red of baked clay. There was nothing to say. They heard Dr. Cowan pouring water in the kitchen and knew that he was washing blood from his hands. After a few minutes he joined them.

"He kept asking for you, Lieutenant. He may not have known what he was saying, but deep inside him he felt his need for you."

"Dr. Cowan, I've been with this man under all kinds of conditions and in all kinds of places. A brother couldn't be nearer to me. Don't let him die!"

"I've let a good many men die, Lieutenant. There have been times when I couldn't help it."

"Please excuse me, sir. What can I do?"

"Sit there and let me see you. I don't know that he can recognize you, but there may be a deeper consciousness than the one on the surface. If you need me I'll be out in the yard. Miss Cragwall, will you come with me, please?"

Nichol sat at the cotside and his eyes never left the wounded man.

"Where's Lieutenant Nichol? Why ain't he here?" The tone was metallic with fever.

"I'm here, Sergeant. I'm here."

"Ginral Forrest don't come. They don't nobody come. I want to see Lieutenant Nichol."

"Here I am, Sergeant. Look at me!"

Dr. Cowan came back, and Mrs. Thedford was with him. She was speaking, and from her voice she was greatly troubled. "I know it's been two hours, maybe two hours and a half, since he was here the last time. I tell you something's happened."

"Perhaps the horse gave out, or the wagon broke down," the doctor answered.

"Jim would have got it fixed. I know Jim. He can fix things."

"Lieutenant, would you mind going to see if anything has happened? I don't want Jim's grandmother to be troubled unnecessarily."

"I'll go with you," Mrs. Thedford said.

Beasley Nichol looked at Goforth's burning face. He hadn't helped any, but the sergeant had asked for him.

Dr. Cowan saw the glance. "Go on," he said. "We'll watch this man while you're gone. See if you can find Jim."

As he left the room Beasley Nichol heard the rasping voice asking why General Forrest hadn't come. Mrs. Thedford carried a lantern though the sun was barely down. Darkness came quickly on the eastern side of Lookout Mountain.

Nichol sensed the strain she was under. And so he talked. He told her of the first time he had seen her grandsons, of the bee tree and the shoes.

"Poor boys!" said the grandmother. "They're orphans, and they've had a mighty hard time."

"Their brothers are in the army, aren't they?"

"They're off fightin' with General Lee. These two lived with us, but one time they took some things to town to sell and the Prophet saw them. He talked with them and they stayed. They've been helping him. I thought you knew it."

"No, I didn't."

"The Prophet told me they were worth as much to the South as a regiment. I'm terribly worried about Jim. They were fightin' down here close about four o'clock."

"I'm sure it is going to be all right," Beasley said. "Tell me about the Prophet."

"I don't know much about him, sir, except he has worked for



General Forrest almost since the war began. I wouldn't know anything except Jim told me some things. What do you reckon would have happened to Jim? He's mighty careful."

"Jim will be all right."

"We better light the lantern. It's getting dark."

The flickering lantern added a ghostly touch to the rough trail they were ascending.

"I don't guess many people know about the Prophet," she said, speaking in a monotone as if a great weight pressed on her voice. "They say the Prophet has been plenty helpful to General Forrest. He stayed in Nashville a long time. Then General Forrest got him to come to Chattanooga."

"Looks like the Yankees would find out about him."

"He must be awful smart." Suddenly her features froze in terror. "O Lord! O Lord! Look there!"

He saw the gaunt horse, still harnessed to the wagon, standing hitched to a cedar tree. They ran quickly to the spot, not farther than a dozen feet off the road. Nichol held the lantern so as to give its light the greatest effect. They could see that the reins were tied deliberately, and that the wagon tilted crazily. The right front wheel had crumbled to the ground. The water barrel was empty. It must have been empty before the wagon broke down, since none of the water had spilled in the bed. Jim must have been on his way back to the spring for more water when the accident occurred. But where was he now?

They stood for a moment saying nothing. Then out of a grandmother's intuition she spoke. "The wagon broke down just here while they was fightin' close by. So Jim took out with the soldiers. That's what he always wanted to do. I'm sure that's what happened."

"Then he'll be back before long. I think the battle's over."

"It's been over long enough for him to get back. We got to find him. Something might have happened to him. We just got to find him."

The road led diagonally up the ridge. Nichol went ahead, holding the lantern for Mrs. Thedford, though there was still some daylight. They could see the lightning in the southwest,

and there was a dewy freshness in the twilight air. A compounding of odors was in their nostrils—the freshness of the young night and the stifling air poisoned by battle.

They moved slowly on up the road, pausing at times to listen. Nichol suddenly swung his lantern to the right side of the road, hiding the left. But it was too late. Mrs. Thedford had seen the man sprawled there, his face turned to the sky, white even in the dark. Her cry was never uttered. It struggled to pass her lips but she held it back. Quickly she was by his side, kneeling to see if it was Jim. It was a Southern soldier, a middle-aged man, and he was dead.

"I'll tell them where he is," Nichol said. "I'll tell them just as soon as we get back."

They walked on. "Wait!" said Mrs. Thedford. "If he's in hearing he'll answer me—if he can hear." She called out in clear urgent tones that carried across the night, "Jim! Jim! Oh, Jim!"

There was no answer. After a few moments they proceeded.

"It might be," Nichol said, "that Jim is back home by now, waiting for you."

"We'll go on awhile," she said quietly. Every hundred feet she would stop and call, "Jim! Oh, Jim!" Again she called. And again. Nichol wanted to beg her to go back to her house, but there was such determination about her that he kept silent, and they plodded on up the ridge.

Suddenly she grabbed Nichol's arm. "What was that? Didn't you hear something?"

"No," he answered quickly.

Once more she gave her clear call. Now at last from the ridge above them they heard an answer, weak but distinct: "Here I am, Grandma."

She did not wait for Nichol but started running toward the spot. He kept close behind her holding the lantern in front of him.

The boy was lying among the cedars on a spreading rock that lay flush with the surface. One leg was stretched away from him, grotesquely twisted.

"Jim, what is it? Honey, what is it? Tell me, Jim, what is it?"

"My leg, Grandma. It's broke."

"Oh, oh!" Relief was in her voice. Broken legs got well.

"It's bad broke, Grandma."

Mrs. Thedford knelt by him. Nichol held the lantern to throw its rays on the boy.

"I'm glad you come, Grandma. I was gittin' skeered."

"Jim, let me look at your leg. We've got to get you home." It was no plain break. The bone was shattered.

"Jim, what happened?"

"Why, Grandma, the Yankees shot me." There was a trace of pride in Jim's answer, and more than a trace when he said, "We whupped 'em, Grandma."

"We've got to get you home," said Nichol, "and the question is how. I can carry you all right, but I'm afraid it would be bad for the leg."

"I can walk along and hold it," Mrs. Thedford said.

"Too risky. You stay here with Jim. I'll go back to the house and bring the first ambulance that comes. You keep the lantern. I've got cat's eyes."

He straightened to his feet, but he did not leave. His eyes were turned up the hill. He had heard a wagon coming down the hill toward them. It was bumping badly, but it seemed to be sticking to the crude road.

"Yankees!" said Mrs. Thedford trying to hold the lantern so as to hide its light.

"It ain't Yankees, Grandma. We run 'em off."

"It wouldn't be Yankees," said Nichol. "Not here. I'm glad to hear that wagon. It's a way to get Jim home."

He hurried to the road and swung his lantern across it.

"Whoa!" said a voice vaguely familiar. The wagon screeched to a stop. "What you want?" The inquiry came from the driver's seat.

"Who are you?"

"That ain't exactly the question, pardner, and this gun I got shoots purty good."

"Well, don't shoot it. Tell me who you are."

"Wait!" said a second voice. "That feller sounds like Lieu-

tenant Nichol. He's liable to turn up anywhere. We better see who it is."

"Wheeler, you and Judd get right down off that wagon you stole from the Yankees, both of you. I've got something for you to do."

"Gosh, it *is* Lieutenant Nichol. What makes you think, sir, we stole this wagon from the Yankees?"

"You've got it, haven't you? That's proof enough."

"It's one o' them new Studebakers," Judd said proudly. "I've shore been wantin' to git holt o' one of 'em."

"Bed'll make a general out of you. No, on second thought, he'll do better than that. He'll let you stay a corporal. What's in the wagon?"

"Flour," the two voices said together. Judd specified further, "Biscuit flour."

"There's a Reb soldier here with a broken leg. Move your flour over to one side to make room for him."

"Yes, sir, Lieutenant. You lend us that lantern and we'll fix a dandy place. Is the feller one o' Bed's men?"

"Yes, I suppose you'd say he is, one of the best at that."

"There's a woman!" said Wheeler excitedly. "What's she doin' here?"

"She's his grandmother. Get that place ready."

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Five minutes later they were rattling down the ridge. Mrs. Thedford was back in the wagon with Jim. Nichol rode on the seat with Judd and Wheeler.

"Did the Yankees have more wagons than they could use and make you a free present of this one?" Nichol asked with good-humored sarcasm.

"That ain't jes exactly the way it was," said Judd. "We had to persuade 'em some."

"I thought maybe you did. But I still don't see how you got two miles or more south of General Forrest's position. Did it take all of that persuading?"

"Yes sir, jes about. We musta follered this wagon a piece, and while we was doin' it Bed took his soldiers and sorta went off and left us."

"Looks like when we go into action the ahmy'd at least try to keep up," Wheeler said plaintively. "It ain't right to dee-sert us like this."

"A most palpable hit, Corporal. I shall speak firmly to General Forrest when I see him. He simply must stop deserting you. I'll make a point of it."

"Tell him to rustle up a good biscuit cook now we got some flour. That boy in there much hurt?"

"I think his leg is in a bad fix. I don't think he lost much blood, though. You know Sergeant Goforth, don't you?"

"I know him," said Wheeler. "He's the one that's all the time goin' off somewheres with you."

"He used to be a blacksmith, I heard," added Judd.

"Yes. Well, the sergeant is badly wounded down at Mrs. Napier's house."

"That her?" He nodded to the rear of the wagon.

"No, this is Mrs. Thedford. She's helping Mrs. Napier with our wounded. I think she can use a sack of your flour, Corporal."

"She can have two sacks. She looks like a woman that could make biscuits Wheeler couldn't use for throwin' rocks."

They passed the dead soldier. The corporals didn't notice anything, and the horses were too used to dead soldiers to flinch. Nichol thought of putting the body into the wagon, but after a moment's consideration he knew this wouldn't do. They kept on bumping down the hill. Nichol called back to Mrs. Thedford and asked if everything was all right. She answered, "Yes." He could hear her and the boy talking in low tones. They came to the gaunt horse hitched by the roadside. Nichol asked Wheeler to stop the team. He told Judd about the horse.

"I want you to bring the horse on to the house. It isn't far. You can sit in the back and lead him."

"I'd ruther walk," said Judd. "I'm tired a-settin'."



But when he had unhitched the horse from the broken wagon, Mrs. Thedford said she would hold the reins and let it follow.

As soon as they reached the house, Dr. Cowan and Hunter came out, thinking it was one of the improvised ambulances. Nichol told their story and then inquired about the sergeant.

"He's just about the same," Hunter said. "He keeps on asking for you."

"He'll be better or worse—one or the other—before long," said Dr. Cowan. His voice was very tired.

The soldiers carried Jim in, and the doctor and Mrs. Thedford followed. Nichol told Judd and Wheeler to stay around awhile. They might be needed. He suggested that Forrest's men were celebrating their assumed capture by the Yankees with outbursts of great rejoicing since it would mean more rations for the rest of them.

"Jeff Davis ought to have Bed arrested for dee-sertin' us," said Judd. "We'll be here any time you need us, Lieutenant."

Nichol hurried into the house and to Goforth's cot. Hunter followed him. The sergeant's eyes were open but they were blank and glassy. "Ain't Ginral Forrest comin'? I want to see him. Where's Captain Crockett? I say I want Lieutenant Nichol to come here. What did he run off for? He's no coward. *Cra-ack, cra-ack!* They won't use that bridge again."

"Here I am, Sergeant. This is Nichol. Here I am."

The sergeant fell silent, but his unwavering eyes were on Nichol and he plucked continuously at the sheets. The only sounds in the house were random footsteps, heavy breathing and a soldier's whimpering in the hall.

Dr. Cowan came in. "I've got to work on that boy's leg now. There's a bad fracture, but with the help of the Lord—and you, my dear—I'll save it." A faint touch of humor livened his wan voice. "I want you to give him the chloroform, Miss Crag-wall."

When they had gone Nichol said again to the sergeant, "I'm here. This is Nichol. I'm here." He kept repeating, "I'm here."

"He's in jail. They caught him. *Cra-ack!* They can't haul

their stuff over that bridge no more. It fell on Lieutenant Nichol. Why ain't the ginral here?"

As if in response, General Nathan Bedford Forrest, followed by Captain Hume Crockett, came into the room. Forrest's eyes asked the question and Nichol answered it.

"I don't believe his fever is as high as it was. Maybe that's a good sign. Dr. Cowan is worried about him."

"So am I. Where's the doc?"

Nichol told him, and General Forrest left the room.

Dr. Cowan and Hunter Cragwall were at Jim's side. The surgeon was putting homemade splints into place, and Hunter was unfolding some strips of cloth. Jim was unconscious and the acrid smell of chloroform filled the room.

Dr. Cowan looked up. "Hello, General," he said without surprise.

"Hello, Doc. You look like you need rest."

"Maybe, but these soldiers need help more."

Dr. Cowan kept at work. Hunter Cragwall moved the lantern to help him see better and the rays fell briefly on Jim's face.

"Wait a minute," said the general. "Hold that lantern up. I want to see this fellow."

She shifted the lantern.

"Jehosephat, that's one of the boys who worked with the Prophet! How'd that lad get here?"

They told him.

"So the woman I saw is his——" He broke off. Then he spoke again. "Doc, you treat that boy just like he's Jeff Davis."

"All right, General. I thought you were just talking when you said I needed rest. He'll be Jeff Davis as far as I'm concerned."

Crockett turned to Nichol. "General Forrest told me about what you saw. You certainly had your part in this battle. Someday I'll take you on another trip."

"I'll consider your offer, Captain. What about the two correspondents?"

"They preferred to remain alive. They're probably interviewing General Thomas at Rossville by now."

General Forrest, Crockett and Nichol sat by Goforth's cot for half an hour or more. A candle burned dimly on the mantelpiece, and a lantern was available for a clearer view. The sergeant was quiet, no longer babbling the incoherent thoughts that coursed through his mind, no longer plucking viciously at the sheet. His breathing was regular and normal.

Dr. Cowan entered, took his lantern and held it near Goforth's face. He lifted a wrist and placed an expert finger on the pulse. They could see his lips move as he counted the heartbeats. "He's better."

"I thought I'd be," the sergeant said clearly. His eyes were bright with the light of reason.

"Every minute you're away from the army, Sergeant, keeps the war going on that much longer."

His eyes traveled round the room. "There's been a battle?"

"Yes, Sergeant, a terrible battle, and we whipped them bad." General Forrest added a postscript: "Though God knows what it will amount to!"

"I'll be back before long," said Goforth. "I think I could go right now."

"Not now, but soon, Sergeant. Don't hurry. . . . May I speak to the lady of the house?"

Mrs. Napier came, and the General bowed in his most courtly Middle Tennessee manner. "Madam, you are a true friend of the South, and while General Cheatham is the man to thank you officially, I want to tell you that I think you're a noble woman."

Mrs. Thedford joined them. "And you, ma'am," said General Forrest. "I think your two grandsons are real patriots."

"Much obliged, General Forrest. I'll tell the boys. They love to work for you."

"Mrs. Dewitt has been a fine helper," said Mrs. Napier.

"I haven't any doubt of it. Her husband's a devoted servant of the Lord. Good night, ma'am, and to all of you! Nichol, I

want to speak to you and Crockett outside, and if Miss Cragwall can get away I'd like for her to come too."

They went out the front gate and around toward the barn a few paces, for wounded soldiers were placed near the gate. The bulk of the wagon which Judd and Wheeler had taken as booty loomed against the sky.

"What's that?" said the general, ever observant. "Have the ambulances quit for the night? They can't stop now."

Nichol told him of the latest exploit of those archfoes of the Yankee commissary wagons, Judd and Wheeler.

"Jehosephat! Flour! You mean a wagonload of it?"

"A whole large wagonload of it, minus two sacks promised to Mrs. Napier."

"A wagon of flour, biscuit flour! Go get those boys. I want to give them blue ribbons and gold medals. Ever' time we have a battle they dodge it and go off and steal a Yankee wagon."

Nichol roused the two soldiers from deep sleep. They reported, wiping sleep from their eyes. "Yes sir, Ginral Forrest," said Judd. "Anything you'd like for us to do?"

"If there is, jes say the word," Corporal Wheeler added reassuringly.

"President Jeff Davis hasn't got a ginral I'd ruther soldier for."

"If I had a chancet to join with Ginral Lee, I wouldn't take it."

"Shut up, both of you! You're plain liars. Where'd you get that wagon?"

"There was three of them. They was quite a piece off. They looked like they had flour in them—that is, we thought they looked like they might. Well, we thought you'd want it and we took out after them——"

"The ahmy went off and left us." Wheeler was clearly aggrieved.

"We coulda split up and maybe took two of 'em, but that didn't seem safe."

"And by the time we took this'n the others got away." Obviously Corporal Wheeler was somewhat bitter from the memory.

"We done the best we could, Ginral Forrest." Humility shone through Judd's words, even in the darkness.

"How'd you get here with that wagon?"

"We come by the road," said Judd.

"All right. Leave two sacks for Mrs. Napier and get the rest to the army as quick as you can. I suppose you can find the way?"

"I reckon we can, sir," said Wheeler. "Anyhow, we'll try."

"And tell the cooks to have hot biscuits for breakfast, two around and not little teeny ones either. And tell 'em that any cook that turns out sad ones I'll have him shot."

The wagon drove away in the darkness. Hunter Cragwall came out of the house and joined them.

"I want to talk with you three, and I got to be in a hurry, for I ought to be back with the troops right now." He paused, and they waited in silence for him to continue.

"We whipped 'em good today, all but Thomas, and I claim we whipped him too. Part of the Yankees didn't stop till they got all the way to Chattanooga, and the rest of 'em are spending the night in Rossville. They'll go on into town tomorrow or the next day. My notion is to hit 'em hard with all we got at daylight in the mornin', and then move on to town. We can finish the whippin' we started, tomorrow. But I doubt if we can if we put it off longer 'n that. But my fear is we won't do anything tomorrow. We haven't got that kind o' commandin' officer. We'll sit aroun' all day and spend the time rejoicin'. The Yankees'll go on into Chattanooga and hole up there. Then what'll happen I plain just don't know."

He was silent again and then resumed. "Nichol, I want you to go into Chattanooga tonight. There's a lot going to be happenin' there in the next week or two, and I don't want to be left out of it. I don't feel right unless I'm kept posted. And I'm goin' to depend on you to do it. So you dress up in them fancy clothes you been using and hightail it for Chattanooga. I haven't got a place ready for you to stay at this time, but you're good at such things, so I'll leave that to you. But I got a place ready for you, young lady."

"For me?"

"Yes, ma'am, for you. It isn't where you were before. It's with a nice widow lady on Walnut Street. The number is—" he consulted a worn notebook—"34. The lady'll fix you up. You see, a lot of our boys'll be in and out of the place and they'll need help."

"Yes, General Forrest," she said weakly. "When am I to go?"

"Why, tonight. That's about as soon as you could. You'll start getting business tomorrow. I brought you in a Yankee suit to wear that would make Rosecrans' chief aide jealous. Into town you go, both of you. I think I'll send Crockett just as soon as the sergeant is out of danger, and that'll be soon. The boy's as tough as any pine knot."

"Who'll take my place here?"

"Lady, in this war, sometimes don't nobody take anybody's place. But we'll take care of these three grand ladies. The three Vidito ladies are coming right away. I've sent for them. We wouldn't send you away, but there can't anybody do this work in town like you can. Good luck, Nichol! My regards, ma'am. Crockett, stay for a while with the sergeant."

The general galloped from the Napier home.

"He forgot to give me the clothes," Hunter said.

"Here they are. I dug them up for you." Crockett handed the package to her. "Your horse is hitched yonder. Good luck to both of you! I'll be bringing the sergeant into town right away."

They went into the house. The wounded slept, though fitfully, with now and then a low restrained whimper. Goforth was sleeping quietly. Hunter laid her hand on his forehead. The high heat had cooled. The sergeant would ride again with Bedford Forrest, with Crockett, with Nichol.

"I must tell Mrs. Napier and Mrs. Dewitt why I'm leaving," Hunter whispered to Nichol. "Yes, and Mrs. Thedford. They are three angels."

Mrs. Thedford was at Jim's side. The younger boy was still sleeping. Mrs. Dewitt was making chicken broth. Mrs. Napier was at a soldier's cot. They gathered in the kitchen together.

"General Forrest wants me to go to town tonight," Hunter told them.

"How?" asked Mrs. Napier.

"He sent a horse for me and a Yankee uniform."

After a moment Mrs. Napier said, "We'll miss you, but we'll get along. General Forrest is sending the Vidito girls to help. The battle is over, I suppose."

"I'm going to stay on a while," said Mrs. Dewitt. "The last time my husband was here we talked things over. He thinks it's my Christian duty to help here. He quoted Scripture to bear him out. Maybe he wants me to be near him too. I think he does. Anyhow, I'd rather stay now that I'm here. I'd feel pretty empty back in Fayetteville right now."

"We'd feel pretty empty without you."

"Jim told me awhile ago that he had to get well right away so he could get back to General Forrest," Mrs. Thedford said somewhat irrelevantly. "Jim hasn't had much chance but he's a good boy."

"Mr. Dewitt said if anybody ever did his Christian duty in this world it was Jim hauling water."

"He thought of it himself," said Mrs. Thedford proudly. "General Forrest didn't tell him to do it. Didn't nobody tell him. It was his notion."

"I suppose I'd better go change to my Yankee uniform. I'm going in with Lieutenant Nichol."

"How lovely!" said Mrs. Dewitt.

"Oh, my dear!" said Mrs. Napier.

"When the war is over, come to see us."

"Us?"

"Us. Just as soon as the war is over. That's as long as I'm going to wait. It'll be *us* after that."

"I say that's good sense," Mrs. Napier affirmed. "He's a nice young man."

"I, too, say it's good sense. If I hadn't taken things in hand before we got married, Mr. Dewitt would have thought up another protracted meeting or something."

A boy whose leg had been amputated was calling for water

and Mrs. Napier left hurriedly. Immediately after that Mrs. De-witt started on her round.

Halfway through changing into her blue uniform Hunter saw lightning flash in the southwest and a few seconds later she heard the sullen roar of the thunder. An optimistic thought crept into her mind. If it should be raining, their entrance to Chattanooga would be safer. The enemy would be much less observant. Again there was a flash of lightning that lingered among the treetops, and the thunder that followed was a pleasant sound. It meant creating, not destroying.

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Lieutenant Beasley Nichol and Hunter Cragwall made their way along the road that led slantingly into the Chattanooga highway. It was an empty road, with none of the debris and confusion of war. The moon would not rise till after midnight and clouds covered the western half of the heavens. The velvety blackness of the night was deepened by the lightning that played at intervals across the sweep of sky that rose above Lookout Mountain. A light wind alternately whispered among the trees and sank into silence. There was definite coolness in the air. The desultory sounds of people passing reached their ears, and the low faraway rumble of wagons came from the main road that led to Rossville and Chattanooga.

"It's a lovely night," Hunter said. "I like lightning and thunder if they are not too close."

"I like rain, too, and the closer the better. I'd like very much, my dear, for both of us to get soaked. I'd keep thinking of the grass and the trees, and how welcome the rain is to them. But if I'm any weather prophet at all, it's going to turn cold."

"If it rains, I'll thank every drop that falls on me," she said merrily. "How lovely to be with you in the rain! We've never been together in the rain. We've never talked enough anywhere. You have plans. I do not know them."

"I have no plans with you left out."

"Of course not. Do you expect to return to the stage? To go back to Edwin Forrest? Once you said so."

"It is what I can do best; what I love to do most. But you'll help to decide."

"At any rate you'll take a lot of cues from me."

"I'll pray never to miss one. I'm tired of war, my dear. I joined gladly. I've tried to do whatever General Forrest wanted. I shall go on to the war's end—or mine."

"Do not say it. You're tired."

"Yes, tired of seeing dead men, mangled men. . . ."

"Don't! You are too tired. Perhaps we'd better not talk now. Silence would be precious with you at my side."

"I suppose I'm tired, but it would rest me to find more purpose and less accident in these Southern armies. I haven't said this before, but it has been growing on me. In war it is not possible to keep from seeing dead and mangled men. That is a part of it one can't escape. But I've seen too many. I've seen four where two would have brought us the same advantage. General Forrest is a hard driver. He uses his men hard, but he never wastes them."

"That bridge. I heard of it."

"No one was wasted, but even if not one of us had got away, by all the terms of war it would still have been a profitable mission."

"No."

"Yes. Oh, I don't want to give my life for nothing. More than ever I want to keep it. But I know what sort of business war is. I've watched it. If you see a ford across a creek, you trade five men for it. If you see the enemy on a mountain, you pay a thousand to get them off. I don't like it, but I'm not complaining. What leaves me depressed is paying a thousand when five hundred would have been enough. Bed Forrest drives sharp bargains. Some of the rest don't. They think we're too cheap."

"Will we win in the end?"

"I don't know. I was sure we would till lately. God only knows how many men we lost today! A week ago we could have got what we've won today for half the men we've paid."



He stopped with a dry laugh. "And I'll say no more on that subject. I promise you, sweetheart. Let's talk no more of death. Let's talk of life."

"Of life together."

"Of life together."

"Together at home."

"And no disguise for me to wear except to play the part of Laertes."

"And no disguises for me to make except for you to play the role of Hamlet."

He looked at her through the dark. "I've heard it said that the proper wife reserves the right to name the role for her husband to play, though the reference was not to the drama. Very well, my dear: it shall be Hamlet. I'll play Hamlet if that's the way you wish it. Of course it will require some adjustment with Edwin Forrest, but that shouldn't be difficult."

They were nearing the main road. They could hear horsemen galloping northward.

"We'll stop and wait till they get by. These uniforms don't show much in the dark, but our faces do. We'd better take no chances. When they've gone up the road, we'll cross and then follow back trails till we come to it again beyond Rossville. We'll be among our fellow Yankees, and all will be well."

Some cavalymen were passing as they neared the road. Two hundred feet away they stopped and waited for the crossing to clear. The cloud was slowly mounting the southwestern sky. Occasionally the lightning flamed with dazzling brightness across the cloud, and the answering thunder was deep-toned and prolonged, lingering among the mountains. The continuing rasp of the cicadas in the trees was strangely musical. A bird in a near-by tree screamed at the manners of some intruder, and the slow flapping of wings sounded in retreat. From far away toward Ringgold came the whistle of a railroad engine whose shrillness the miles silvered with a strange longing. The chill stayed in the air. Whether or not there was rain, it would be colder tomorrow. There was the unmistakable promise of it in the night air.

"The night, how lovely it is!" she said.

"How lovely everything is—with you," he answered. "Yes, the night is lovely."

"It hides the ugliness of the day." She flinched as she said it, remembering.

"Or adds to its beauty."

A mockingbird in the tree above them broke into song. There were no preliminary notes, no searching for pitch, no tentative feeling-out of the measures—nothing but a sudden burst of music that filled all the spaces among the pine trees and soared upward to the skies.

"Listen," he said, and there was a breathless quality in his low voice.

"A mockingbird," she said.

"No mockingbird, my dear, but a sign from heaven that the world is still good."

He held out his hand and found hers there in the darkness awaiting it.

"Still good, my dear," he repeated.

They rode on, but stopped at the crossroads to listen. The mockingbird was still singing.

THE END